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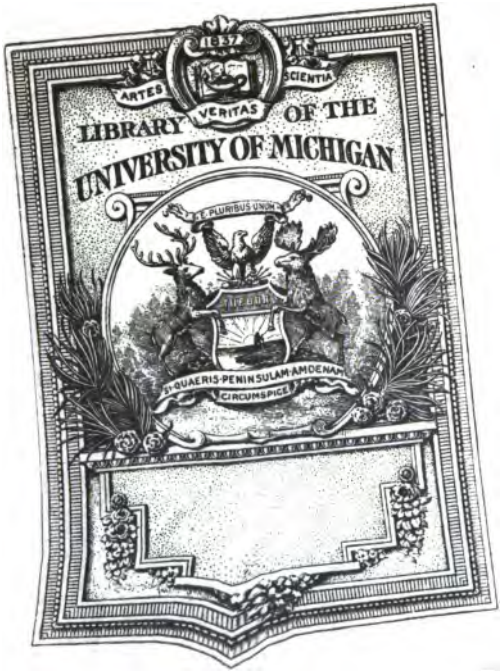
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SUNRISE:

A STORY OF THESE TIMES.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

"A PRINCESS OF THULE," "A DAUGHTER OF HETH," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1881.

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SUNRISE.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST INTERVIEW.

ONE chilly afternoon in February, while all London was busy coming and going, an open barouche was being rapidly driven along Piccadilly in the direction of Coventry Street; the two occupants of which, despite the dull roar of vehicles around them, seemed to be engaged in eager conversation. One of these two was a tall, handsome, muscular-looking man of about thirty, with a sun-tanned complexion, piercing grey eyes, and a reddish-brown beard cropped in the foreign fashion; the other, half hidden among the voluminous furs of the carriage, was a pale, humpbacked lad, with a fine, expressive, intellectual face, and large, animated, almost woman-like eyes. The former was George Brand, of Hill Beeches, Bucks., a bachelor unattached, and a person of no particular occupation, except that he had tumbled about the world a good deal, surveying mankind with more or less of interest or indifference. His companion and friend, the bright-eyed, beautiful-faced, humpbacked lad, was Ernest Francis D'Agincourt, thirteenth Baron Evelyn.

The discussion was warm; though the elder of the two friends spoke deprecatingly, at times even scornfully.

"I know what is behind all that," he said. "They are making a dupe of you, Evelyn. A parcel of miserable Leicester Square conspirators, plundering the working man of all countries of his small savings, and humbugging him with promises of twopenny-halfpenny revolutions! That is not the sort of thing for you to mix in. It is not English, all that dagger and dark-lantern business—even if it were real; but when it is only theatrical—when they are only stage daggers—when the wretched creatures who mouthe about assassination and revolution are only swaggering for halfpence—bah! What part do you propose to play?"

"I tell you it has nothing to do with daggers and dark lanterns," said the other, almost angrily. "Why will you run your head against a windmill? Why must you see further into a milestone than anybody else? I wonder, with all your travelling, you have not got rid of some of that detestable English prejudice and suspicion. I tell you that when I am allowed, even as an outsider, to see something of this vast organization for the defence of the oppressed, for the protection of the weak, the vindication of the injured, in every country throughout the globe—when I see the splendid possibilities before it—when I find that even a useless fellow like myself may do some little thing to lessen the mighty mass of injustice and wrong in the world—well, I am not going to stop to see that every one of my associates is of pure English birth, with a brother-in-law on the Bench, and an uncle in the House of Lords. I am glad enough to have something to do that is worth doing; something to believe in; something

to hope for. You—what do you believe in? What is there in heaven or earth that you believe in?"

"Suppose I say that I believe in you, Evelyn?" said his friend, quite good-naturedly; "and some day, when you can convince me that your newly discovered faith is all right, you may find me becoming your meek disciple, and even your apostle. But I shall want something more than Union speeches, you know."

By this time the carriage had passed along Coventry Street, turned into Prince's Street, and been pulled up opposite a commonplace-looking house in that somewhat dingy thoroughfare, Lisle Street, Soho.

"Not quite Leicester Square, but near enough to serve," said Brand, with a contemptuous laugh, as he got out of the barouche, and then, with the greatest of care and gentleness, assisted his companion to alight.

They crossed the pavement, and rang a bell. Almost instantly the door was opened by a stout, yellow-haired, blear-eyed old man, who wore a huge overcoat adorned with masses of shabby fur, and who carried a small lamp in his hand, for the afternoon had grown to dusk. The two visitors were evidently expected. Having given the younger of them a deeply respectful greeting in German, the fur-coated old gentleman shut the door after them, and proceeded to show the way up a flight of narrow and not particularly clean wooden stairs.

"Conspiracy doesn't seem to pay," remarked George Brand, half to himself.

On the landing they were confronted by a number of doors, one of which the old German threw open. They entered a large, plainly furnished, well-lit room, looking pretty much like a lawyer's office, though the walls were mostly hung with maps and plans of foreign

cities. Brand looked round with a supercilious air. All his pleasant and friendly manner had gone. He was evidently determined to make himself as desperately disagreeable as an Englishman can make himself when introduced to a foreigner whom he suspects. But even he would have had to confess that there was no suggestion of trap-doors or sliding panels in this ordinary, business-like room; and not a trace of a dagger or a dark lantern anywhere.

Presently, from a door opposite, an elderly man, of middle height and spare and sinewy frame, walked briskly in, shook hands with Lord Evelyn, was introduced to the tall, red-bearded Englishman (who still stood, hat in hand, and with a portentous stiffness in his demeanour), begged his two guests to be seated, and himself sat down at an open bureau, which was plentifully littered with papers.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Brand," he said, speaking carefully, and with a considerable foreign accent. "Lord Evelyn has several times promised me the honour of making your acquaintance."

Mr. Brand merely bowed: he was intent on making out what manner of man this suspected foreigner might be; and he was puzzled. At first sight Ferdinand Lind appeared to be about fifty or fifty-five years of age; his closely cropped hair was grey; and his face, in repose, somewhat careworn. But then when he spoke there was an almost youthful vivacity in his look; his dark eyes were keen, quick, sympathetic; and there was even a certain careless ease about his dress—about the turned-down collar and French-looking neck-tie, for example—that had more of the air of the student than of the pedant about it. All this at the first glance.

It was only afterwards you came to perceive what was denoted by those heavy, seamed brows, the firm, strong mouth, and the square line of the jaw. These told you of the presence of an indomitable and inflexible will. Here was a man born to think and control and command.

"With that prospect before me," he continued, apparently taking no notice of the Englishman's close scrutiny, "I must ask you, Mr. Brand—well, you know, it is merely a matter of form—but I must ask you to be so very kind as to give me your word of honour that you will not disclose anything you may see or learn here. Have you any objection?"

Brand stared, then said coldly—

"Oh dear, no. I will give you that pledge, if you wish it."

"It is so easy to deal with Englishmen," said Mr. Lind, politely. "A word, and it is done. But I suppose Lord Evelyn has told you that we have no very desperate secrets. Secrecy, you know, one must use sometimes; it is an inducement to many; most people are fond of a little mystery. And it is harmless?"

Brand said nothing; Lord Evelyn thought he might have been at least civil. But when an Englishman is determined on being stiff, his stiffness is gigantic.

"If I were to show you some of the tricks of this very room," said this grizzled old foreigner with the boyish neck-tie, "you might call me a charlatan; but would that be fair? We have to make use of various means for what we consider a good end, a noble end; and there are many people who love mystery and secrecy. With you English it is different—you must have everything above-board."

The pale, fine face of the sensitive lad sitting there became clouded over with disappointment. He had brought this old friend of his with some vague hope that he might become a convert, or at least be sufficiently interested to make inquiries; but Brand sat silent, with a cold indifference that was only the outward sign of an inward suspicion.

"Sometimes, it is true," continued Mr. Lind, in nowise disconcerted, "we stumble on the secrets of others. Our association has innumerable feelers; and we make it our business to know what we can of everything that is going on. For example, I could tell you of an odd little incident that occurred last year in Constantinople. A party of four gentlemen were playing cards there in a private room."

Brand started. The man who was speaking took no notice.

"There were two Austrian officers, a Roumanian Count, and an Englishman," he continued, in the most matter-of-fact way. "It was in a private room, as I said. The Englishman was, after a time, convinced that the Roumanian was cheating; he caught his wrist —showed the false cards; then he managed to ward off the blow of a dagger which the Roumanian aimed at him, and by main force carried him to the door and threw him downstairs. It was cleverly done, but the Englishman was very big and strong. Afterwards the two Austrian officers, who knew the Verdt family, begged the Englishman never to reveal what had occurred; and the three promised secrecy. Was not that so?"

The man looked up carelessly. The Englishman's apathy was no longer visible.

"Y-yes," he stammered.

"Would you like to know what became of Count Verdt?" he asked, with an air of indifference.

"Yes, certainly," said the other.

"Ah! Of course you know the Castello dell' Ovo?"

"At Naples? Yes."

"You remember that out at the point, beside the bridge that leads from the shore to the fortress, there are many big rocks, and the waves roll about among them. Three weeks after you caught Count Verdt cheating at cards, his dead body was found floating there."

"Gracious Heavens!" Brand exclaimed, with his face grown pale. And then he added breathlessly, "Suicide?"

Mr. Lind smiled.

"No. Reassure yourself. When they picked out the body from the water, they found the mouth gagged, and the hands tied behind the back."

Brand stared at this man.

"Then you——?" He dared not complete the question.

"I? Oh, I had nothing to do with it, any more than yourself. It was a Camorra affair."

He had been speaking quite indifferently; but now a singular change came over his manner.

"And if I *had* had something to do with it?" he said, vehemently; and the dark eyes were burning with a quick anger under the heavy brows. Then he spoke more slowly, but with a firm emphasis in his speech. "I will tell you a little story; it will not detain you, sir. Suppose that you have a prison so overstocked with political prisoners that you must keep sixty or seventy in the open yard adjoining the outer wall.

You have little to fear; they are harmless poor wretches; there are several old men, two women. Ah! but what are the poor devils to do in those long nights that are so dark and so cold? However they may huddle together, they freeze; if they keep not moving, they die; you find them dead in the morning. If you are a Czar you are glad of that, for your prisons are choked; it is very, very convenient. Now suppose you have a clever fellow who finds out a narrow passage between the implement-house and the wall; and he says, 'There, you can work all night at digging a passage out; and who in the morning will suspect?' Is not that a fine discovery, when one must keep moving in the dark, to prevent one's self stiffening into a corpse? Oh, yes; then you find the poor devils in their madness begin to tear the ground up; what tools have they but their fingers, when the implement-house is locked? The poor devils!—old men, too, and women; and how they take their turn at the slow work, hour after hour, week after week, all through the long, still nights! Inch by inch it is; and the poor devils become like rabbits, burrowing for a hole to reach the outer air; and do you know that, after a time, the first wounds heal, and your fingers become like stumps of iron——"

He held out his two hands; the ends of the fingers were seamed and corrugated, as if they had been violently scalded. But he could not hold them steady —they were shaking with the suppressed passion that made his whole frame tremble.

"Relay after relay, night after night, week after week, month after month, until those poor creatures of rabbits had actually burrowed a passage out into the freedom of God's world again. And some said the

Czar himself had heard of it, and would not interfere, for the prisons were choked; and some said the wife of the governor was Polish, and had a kind heart; but what did it matter when the time was drawing near? And always this clever fellow—do you know, sir, his name was Verdt too?—encouraging, helping, goading these poor people on. Then the last night—how the miserable rabbits of creatures kept huddled together, shivering in the dark, till the hour arrived! and then the death-like stillness they found outside; and the wild wonder and the fear of it; and the old men and the women crying like children to find themselves in the free air again. Marie Falevitch—that was my sister-in-law—she kissed me, and was laughing when she whispered, '*Eljen a haza!*' I think she was a little off her head with the long, sleepless nights."

He stopped for a second; his throat seemed choked.

"Did I tell you they had all got out?—the poor devils all wondering there, and scarcely knowing where to go. And now suppose, sir—ah! you don't know anything about these things, you happy English people—suppose you found the black night around you all at once turned to a blaze of fire—a red hell opened on all sides of you, and the bullets ploughing your comrades down; the old men crying for mercy, the young ones falling only with a groan, the women—my God! Did you ever hear a woman shriek when she was struck through the heart with a bullet? Marie Falevitch fell at my feet, but I could not raise her—I was struck down too. It was a week after that I came to my senses. I was in the prison, but the prison was not quite so full. Czars and governors have a fine way of thinning prisons when they get too crowded!"

These last words were spoken in a calm, contemptuous way; the man was evidently trying hard to control the fierce passion that these memories had stirred up. He had clenched one hand, and put it firmly on the desk before him, so that it should not tremble.

"Well, now, Mr. Brand," he continued, slowly, "let us suppose that when you come to yourself again, you hear the rumours that are about: you hear, for example, that Count Verdt—that exceedingly clever man—has been graciously pardoned by the Czar for revealing the villainous conspiracy of his fellow-prisoners; and that he has gone off to the south with a bag of money. Do you not think that you would remember the name of that clever person? Do you not think you would say to yourself, 'Well, it may not be to-day, or to-morrow, or the next day; *but some day?*'"

Again the dark eyes glowed; but he had a wonderful self-control.

"You would remember the name, would you not, if you had your sister-in-law, and your only brother, and six or seven of your old friends and comrades all shot on the one night?"

"This was the same Count Verdt?" Brand asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said the other, after a considerable pause. Then he added, with an involuntary sigh, "I had been following his movements for a long time; but the Camorra stepped in. They are foolish people, those Camorristi—foolish and ignorant. They are numerous, and powerful; but ill-governed and foolish; remarkably so. They punish for trifling offences, and they do not make sufficient warning of their punishments. Then

I assure you they are quite imbecile in the way they attempt to regulate labour."

He was now talking in quite a matter-of-fact way. The clenched hand was relaxed.

"Besides," continued Ferdinand Lind, with the cool air of a critic, "their conduct is too scandalous. The outer world believes they are nothing but an association of thieves and cut-throats; that is because they do not discountenance vulgar and useless crime; because there is not enough authority nor any proper selection of members. In the affairs of the world, one has sometimes to make use of doubtful agents—that is admitted; and you cannot have any large body of people without finding a few scoundrels among them. I suppose one might even say that about your very respectable Church of England. But you only bring an association into disrepute—you rob it of much usefulness—you put the law and society against it, when you make it the refuge of common murderers and thieves."

"I should hope so," remarked George Brand. If this suspected foreigner had resumed his ordinary manner, so had he: he was again the haughty, reserved, distrustful Englishman.

Lord Evelyn looked sadly distressed. These two men were so obviously antipathetic that it seemed altogether hopeless to think of their ever coming together.

"Well," said Mr. Lind, in his ordinary polished and easy manner, "I must not seek to detain you; for it is a cold night to keep horses waiting. But, Mr. Brand, Lord Evelyn dines with us to-morrow evening; if you have nothing better to do will you join our little party? My daughter, I am sure, will be most pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Do, Brand, there's a good fellow," struck in his friend. "I haven't seen anything of you for such a long time."

"I shall be very happy indeed," said the tall Englishman, wondering whether he was likely to meet a goodly assemblage of sedition-mongers at this foreign person's table.

"We dine at a quarter to eight. The address is No. —, Curzon Street; but perhaps you had better take this card."

So they left; and were conducted down the staircase by the stout old German; and scrambled up into the furs of the barouche.

"So he has a daughter?" said Brand, as the two friends together drove down to Buckingham Street, where they were to dine at his rooms.

"Oh yes; his daughter Natalie," said Lord Evelyn, eagerly. "I am so glad you will see her to-morrow night."

"And they live in Curzon Street," said the other, reflectively. "H'm! Conspiracy *does* pay, then?"

CHAPTER II.

PLEADINGS.

"BROTHER SENIOR WARDEN, your place in the lodge?" said Mr. Brand, looking at the small dinner-table.

"You forget," his companion said. "I am only in the nursery as yet—an Illuminatus Minor, as it were. However, I don't think I can do better than sit where Waters has put me; I can have a glimpse of the lights

on the river. But what an extraordinary place for you to come to for rooms!"

They had driven down through the glare of the great city to this silent and dark little thoroughfare, dismissed the carriage at the foot, climbed up an old-fashioned oak staircase, and found themselves at last received by an elderly person, who looked a good deal more like a bronzed old veteran than an ordinary English butler.

"Halloa, Waters," said Lord Evelyn. "How are you? I don't think I have seen you since you threatened to murder the landlord at Cairo."

"No, my lord," said Mr. Waters, who seemed vastly pleased by this reminiscence, and who instantly disappeared to summon dinner for the two young men.

"Extraordinary?" said Brand, when they had got seated at table. "Oh no. You know my craving for air, space, light, and quiet. Here I have all these. Beneath are the Embankment gardens; beyond that, you see, the river—those lights are the steamers at anchor. As for quiet, the lower floors are occupied by a charitable society; so I fancied there would not be much traffic on the stairs."

The jibe passed unheeded; Lord Evelyn had long ago become familiar with his friend's way of speaking about men and things.

"And so, Evelyn, you have become a pupil of the revolutionaries," George Brand continued, when Waters had put some things before them and retired—"a student of the fine art of stabbing people unawares? What an astute fellow that Lind must be! I will swear it never occurred to one of the lot before. To get an English milord into their ranks! A stroke of

genius! It could only have been projected by a great mind. And then look at the effect throughout Europe if an English milord were to be found with a parcel of Orsini bombs in his possession; every ragamuffin from Naples to St. Petersburg would rejoice; the army of cut-throats would march with a new swagger."

His companion said nothing; but there was a vexed and impatient look on his face.

"And our little daughter—is she pretty? Does she coax the young men to play with daggers?—the innocent little thing! And when you start with your dynamite to break open a gaol, she blows you a kiss? —the charming little fairy! What is it she has embroidered on the ribbon round her neck?—*'Mort aux rois?' 'Sic semper tyrannis?'* No, I saw a much prettier one somewhere the other day: *'Nè si pasce di fresche ruggiade, ma di sangue di membra di re.'* Isn't it charming? It sounds quite idyllic, even in English: *'Not for you the nourishment of freshening dews, but the blood of the limbs of kings!'* The pretty little stabber—is she fierce?"

"Brand, you are too bad!" said the other, throwing down his knife and fork, and getting up from the table. "You believe in neither man, woman, God, nor devil!"

"Would you mind handing over that claret jug?"

"Why," he said, turning passionately towards him, "it is men like you, who have neither faith nor hope nor regret, who are wandering aimlessly in a nightmare of apathy and indolence and indifference, who ought to be the first to welcome any new light breaking in the sky. What is life worth to you? You have nothing to hope for—nothing to look forward to—nothing

you can kill the aimless days with. Why should you desire to-morrow? To-morrow will bring you nothing different from yesterday; you will do as you did yesterday, and the day before yesterday. It is the life of a horse or an ox—not the life of a human being, with the sympathies and needs and aspirations of a man. What is the object of your living at all?"

"I really don't know," said the other, simply.

But this pale, humpbacked lad, with the fine nostrils, the sensitive mouth, the large forehead, and the beautiful eyes, was terribly in earnest. He forgot about his place at table. He kept walking up and down, occasionally addressing his friend directly, at other times glancing out at the dark river and the golden lines of lamps. And he was an eloquent speaker, too. Debarred from most forms of physical exercise, he had been brought up in a world of ideas. When he went to Oxford, it was with some vague notion of subsequently entering the Church; but at Oxford he became speedily convinced that there was no Church left for him to enter. Then he fell back on æstheticism—worshipped Carpaccio, adored Chopin, and turned his rooms at Merton into a museum of Persian embroidery, Flemish metal-work, and Venetian glass. Then he dabbled a little in Comtism; but very soon he threw aside that gigantic make-believe at believing. Nevertheless, whatever was his whim of the moment, it was for him no whim at all, but a burning reality. And in this enthusiasm of his there was no room left for shyness. In fact, these two companions had been accustomed to talk frankly; they had long ago abandoned that self-consciousness which ordinarily restricts the conversation of young Englishmen to

monosyllables. Brand was a good listener, and his friend an eager, impetuous, enthusiastic speaker. The one could even recite verses to the other: what greater proof of confidence?

And on this occasion all this prayer of his was earnest and pathetic enough. He begged this old chum of his to throw aside his insular prejudices and judge for himself. What object had he in living at all, if life were merely a routine of food and sleep? In this selfish isolation, his living was only a process of going to the grave—only that each day would become more tedious and burdensome as he grew older. Why should he not examine and inquire and believe—if that were possible? The world was perishing for want of a new faith: the new faith was here.

At this phrase George Brand quickly raised his head. He was accustomed to these enthusiasms of his friend; but he had not yet seen him in the character of an apostle.

"You know it as well as I, Brand; the last great wave of religion has spent itself; and I suppose Matthew Arnold would have us wait for the mysterious East, the mother of religions, to send us another. Do you remember 'Obermann'?—

'In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad, in furious guise,
Along the Appian Way;

'He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his head with flowers—
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.

'The brooding East with awe beheld
Her impious younger world.
The Roman tempest swelled and swelled,
And on her head was hurled.

'The East bowed low before the blast,
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.' "

The lad had a sympathetic voice; and there was a curious pathetic thrill in the tones of it as he went on to describe the result of that awful musing—the new-born joy awakening in the East—the victorious West veiling her eagles and snapping her sword before this strange new worship of the Child—

"And centuries came, and ran their course,
And, unspent all that time,
Still, still went forth that Child's dear force
And still was at its prime."

But now—in these later days around us?—

"Now He is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down."

The great divine wave had spent itself. But were we to sit supinely by—this was what he asked, though not precisely in these consecutive words, for sometimes he walked to and fro in his eagerness, and sometimes he ate a bit of bread, or sat down opposite his friend for the purpose of better confronting him—to wait for that distant and mysterious East to send us another revelation? Not so. Let the proud-spirited and courageous West, that had learned the teachings of

Christianity but never yet applied them—let the powerful West establish a faith of her own: a faith in the future of humanity itself, with justice and pity and peace its crowned kings—a faith in a future of recompense and atonement to the vast multitudes of mankind who had toiled so long and so grievously—a faith demanding instant action and endeavour and self-sacrifice from those who would be its first apostles.

> "The complaining millions of men
> Darken in labour and pain."

And why should not this Christianity, that had so long been used to gild the thrones of tyrants and glorify the ceremonies of priests—that had so long been monopolized by the rich and the great and the strong, whom its Founder despised and denounced—why should it not at length come to the help of those myriads of the poor and the weak and the suffering, whose cry for help had been for so many centuries disregarded? Here was work for the idle, hope for the hopeless, a faith for them who were perishing for want of a faith.

"You say all this is vague—a vision—a sentiment?" he said, talking in the same eager way. "Then that is my fault. I cannot explain it all to you in a few words. But do not run away with the notion that it is mere words—a St. Simonian dream of perfectibility, or anything like that. It is practical; it exists; it is within reach of you. It is a definite and immense organization; it may be young as yet, but it has courage and splendid aims; and now, with a great work before it, it is eager for aid. You yourself, when you see a child run over, or a woman starving of hunger, or a

blind man wanting to cross a street, are you not ready with your help—the help of your hands or of your purse? Multiply these by millions, and think of the cry for help that comes from all parts of the world. If you but knew, you could not resist. I as yet know little—I only hear the echo of the cry; but my veins are burning; I shall have the gladness of answering 'Yes,' however little I can do. And after all, is not that something? For a man to live only for himself is death—worse than death, for death at least is not contemptible."

"But you see, Evelyn," said his friend, though he did not quite know what to answer to all this outburst, "you must be more cautious. Those benevolent schemes are very noble and very captivating; but sometimes they are in the hands of rather queer people. And besides, do you quite know the limits of this big society? I thought you said something about vindicating the oppressed. Does it include politics?"

"I do not question; I am content to obey," said Lord Evelyn.

"That is not English; unreasoning and blind obedience is mere folly."

"Perhaps so," said the other, somewhat absently; "but I suppose a man accepts whatever satisfies the craving of his own heart. And—and I should not like to go alone on this new thing, Brand. Will you not come some little way with me? If you think I am mistaken, you may turn back; as for me—well, if it were only a dream, I think I would rather go with the Pilgrims on their hopeless quest than stay with the people who come out to wonder at them as they go by. You remember—

'Who is your lady of love, O ye that pass
Singing? And is it for sorrow of that which was
That ye sing sadly, or dream of what shall be?
For gladly at once and sadly it seems ye sing.
—Our lady of love by you is unbeholden;
For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor lips, nor golden
Treasure of hair, nor face nor form; but we
That love, we know her more fair than anything.'"

Yes; he had certainly a pathetic thrill in his voice; but now there was something else—something strange—in the slow and monotonous cadence that caught the acute ear of his friend. And again he went on, but absently, almost as if he were himself listening—

"—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
—Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except he serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain
And work and wait and watch out all his years."

"Evelyn," said George Brand, suddenly, fixing his keen eyes on his friend's face, "where have you heard that? Who has taught you? You are not speaking with your own voice."

"With whose, then?" and a smile came over the pale, calm, beautiful face, as if he had awakened out of a dream.

"That," said Brand, still regarding him, "was the voice of Natalie Lind."

CHAPTER III.

IN A HOUSE IN CURZON STREET.

ARMED with a defiant scepticism, and yet conscious of an unusual interest and expectation, George Brand drove up to Curzon Street on the following evening. As he jumped out of his hansom, he inadvertently glanced at the house.

"Conspiracy has not quite built us a palace as yet," he said to himself.

The door was opened by a little German maid-servant, as neat and round and rosy as a Dresden china shepherdess, who conducted him upstairs, and announced him at the drawing-room. It was not a large room; but there was more of colour and gilding in it than accords with the severity of modern English taste; and it was lit irregularly with a number of candles, each with a little green or rose-red shade. Mr. Lind met him at the door. As they shook hands, Brand caught a glimpse of another figure in the room —apparently that of a tall woman dressed all in cream white, with a bunch of scarlet geraniums in her bosom, and another in her raven-black hair.

"Not the gay little adventuress, then?" was his instant and internal comment. "Better contrived still. The inspired prophetess. Obviously not the daughter of this man at all. Hired."

But when Natalie Lind came forward to receive him, he was more than surprised; he was almost abashed. During a second or two of wonder and involuntary admiration, he was startled out of his critical attitude altogether. For this tall and striking figure

was in reality that of a young girl of eighteen or nineteen, who had the beautifully formed bust, the slender waist, and the noble carriage that even young Hungarian girls frequently have. Perhaps the face, with its intellectual forehead and the proud and firmly cut mouth, was a trifle too calm and self-reliant for a young girl; but all the softness of expression that was wanted, all the gentle and gracious timidity that we associate with maidenhood, lay in the large and dark and lustrous eyes. When, by accident, she turned aside, and he saw the outline of that clear, olive-complexioned face, only broken by the outward curve of the long black lashes, he had to confess to himself that, adventuress or no adventuress, prophetess or no prophetess, Natalie Lind was possessed of about the most beautiful profile he had ever beheld, while she had the air and the bearing of a queen.

Her father and he talked of the various trifling things of the moment; but what he was chiefly thinking of was the singular calm and self-possession of this young girl. When she spoke, her dark, soft eyes regarded him without fear. Her manner was simple and natural to the last degree; perhaps with the least touch added of maidenly reserve. He was forced even to admire the simplicity of her dress—cream or canary white it was, with a bit of white fur round the neck, and round the tight wrists. The only strong colour was that of the scarlet geraniums which she wore in her bosom and in the black masses of her hair; and the vertical sharp line of scarlet of her closed fan.

Once only, during this interval of waiting, did he find that calm serenity of hers disturbed. He happened to observe the photograph of a very handsome

woman near him on the table. She told him she had had a parcel of photographs of friends of hers just sent over from Vienna; some of them very pretty. She went to another table, and brought over a handful. He glanced at them only for a second or two.

"I see they are mostly from Vienna; are they Austrian ladies?" he asked.

"They live in Austria, but they are not Austrians," she answered. And then she added, with a touch of scorn about the beautiful mouth, "Our friends and we don't belong to the women-floggers!"

"Natalie!" her father said; but he smiled all the same.

"I will tell you one of my earliest recollections," she said. "I remember it very well. Kossuth was carrying me round the room on his shoulder. I suppose I had been listening to the talk of the gentlemen; for I said to him, 'When they burned my papa in effigy at Pesth, why was I not allowed to go and see?' And he said—I remember the sound of his voice even now—'Little child, you were not born then. But if you had been able to go, do you know what they would have done to you? They would have flogged you. Do you not know that the Austrians flog women? When you grow up, little child, your papa will tell you the story of Madame von Maderspach.'" Then she added, "That is one of my valued recollections, that when I was a child I was carried on Kossuth's shoulders."

"You have no similar reminiscence of Görgey, I suppose?" Brand said, with a smile.

He had spoken quite inadvertently, without the slightest thought in the world of wounding her feelings. For one thing, he did not know but that she

might consider Görgey a deeply injured person. But he was surprised and shocked by the extraordinary effect which this chance remark produced on the tall and beautiful girl standing there. For an instant she paused, as if not knowing what to say. Then she said proudly—and she turned away as she did so—

"Perhaps you are not aware that there are some names you should not mention in the presence of a Hungarian woman."

What was there in the tone of the voice that made him rapidly glance at her eyes, as she turned away, pretending to carry back the photographs? He was not deceived. Those large dark eyes were full of sudden indignant tears; she had not turned quite quickly enough to conceal them.

Of course, he instantly and amply apologized for his ignorance and stupidity; but what he said to himself was, "That child is not acting. She may be Lind's daughter after all. Poor thing! she is too beautiful and generous and noble to be made the decoy of a revolutionary adventurer."

At this moment, Lord Evelyn arrived, throwing a quick glance of enquiry towards his friend, to see what impression so far had been produced. But the tall, red-bearded Englishman maintained, as the diplomatists say, an attitude of the strictest reserve. The keen grey eyes were respectful, attentive, courteous—especially when they were turned to Miss Lind; beyond that, nothing.

Now they had not been seated at the dinner-table more than a few minutes before George Brand began to ask himself whether it was really Curzon Street he was dining in. The oddly furnished room was adorned

with curiosities to which every capital in Europe would seem to have contributed. The servants, exclusively women, were foreign; the table glass and decorations were all foreign; the unostentatious little banquet was distinctly foreign. Why, the very bell that had summoned them down,—what was there in the soft sound of it that had reminded him of something far away? It was a haunting sound, and he kept puzzling over the vague associations it seemed to call up. At last he frankly mentioned the matter to Miss Lind, who seemed greatly pleased.

"Ah, did you like the sound?" she said, in that low and harmonious voice of hers. "The bell was an invention of my own; shall I show it to you?"

The Dresden shepherdess, by name Anneli, being despatched into the hall, presently returned with an object somewhat resembling in shape a Cheshire cheese, but round at the top, formed of roughly filed metal of a lustrous yellow-grey. Round the rude square handle surmounting it was carelessly twisted a bit of old orange silk; other decoration there was none.

"Do you see what it is now?" she said. "Only one of the great bells the people use for the cattle on the Campagna. Where did I get it? Oh, you know the Piazza Montenara, in Rome, of course? There is a place there where they sell such things to the country people. You could get one without difficulty, if you are not afraid of being laughed at as a mad Englishman. That bit of embroidered ribbon, though, I got in an old shop in Florence."

Indeed, what struck him further was, not only the foreign look of the little room and its belongings, but also the extraordinary familiarity with foreign cities

shown by both Lind and his daughter. As the rambling conversation went on (the sonorous cattle-bell had been removed by the rosy-cheeked Anneli), they appeared to be just as much at home in Madrid, in Munich, in Turin, or Genoa, as in London. And it was no vague and general tourist's knowledge that these two cosmopolitans showed; it was rather the knowledge of a resident—an intimate acquaintance with persons, streets, shops, and houses. George Brand was a bit of a globe-trotter himself, and was entirely interested in this talk about places and things that he knew. He got to be quite at home with those people whose own home seemed to be Europe. Reminiscences, anecdotes, flowed freely on; the dinner passed with unconscious rapidity. Lord Evelyn was delighted, and pleased beyond measure to observe the more than courteous attention that his friend paid to Natalie Lind.

But all this while what mention was there of the great and wonderful organization—a mere far-off glimpse of which had so captured Lord Evelyn's fervent imagination? Not a word. The sceptic who had come among them could find nothing either to justify or allay his suspicions. But it might safely be said that, for the moment at least, his suspicions as regarded one of those two were dormant. It was difficult to associate trickery and conspiracy and cowardly stabbing with this beautiful young Hungarian girl, whose calm, dark eyes were so fearless. It is true that she appeared very proud-spirited and generous and enthusiastic; and you could cause her cheek to pale whenever you spoke of injury done to the weak or the suffering or the poor. But that was different from the secret sharpening of poniards.

Once only was reference made to the various secret associations that are slowly but eagerly working under the apparent social and political surface of Europe. Some one mentioned the Nihilists. Thereupon Ferdinand Lind, in a quiet and matter-of-fact way, without appearing to know anything of the *personnel* of the society, and while expressing strong disapproval of its aims, took occasion to speak of the extraordinary devotion of those people.

"There has been nothing like it," said he, "in all the history of what men have done for a political cause. You may say they are fanatics, madmen, murderers; that they only provoke further tyranny and oppression; that their efforts are wholly and solely mischievous. It may be so; I believe it to be so. But I speak of the individual and what he is ready to do. The sacrifice of one's own life is taken almost as a matter of course. Each man knows that for him the end will almost certainly be Siberia or a public execution; and he accepts it. You will find young men, well-born, well educated, who go away from their friends and their native place, who go into a remote village, and offer to work at the commonest trade, at apprentices' wages. They settle there; they marry; they preach nothing but the value of honest work and extreme sobriety and respect for superiors. Then, after some years, when they are regarded as beyond all suspicion, they begin, cautiously and slowly, to spread abroad their propaganda—to teach respect rather for human liberty, for justice, for self-sacrifice, for those passions that prompt a nation to adventure everything for its freedom. All this is excellent, if they would stop there; but then they go on into mere folly. To renovate

society, you must destroy it; and you must begin by killing kings, and especially governors of gaols. In the midst of this absurdity, the Nihilist teacher is arrested, and banished or executed; but the association remains. The Russians at this moment have no notion how widespread and pernicious it is."

"The head-quarters, are they in Russia itself?" asked Brand, on the watch for any admission.

"Who knows?" said the other, absently. "Perhaps there are none."

"None? Surely there must be some power to say what is to be done, to enforce obedience?"

"What if each man finds that in himself?" said Lind, with something of the air of a dreamer coming over the firm and thoughtful and rugged face. "It may be a brotherhood. All associations do not need to be controlled by kings and priests and standing armies."

"And the end of all this devotion, you say, is Siberia or death?"

"For the man, perhaps; for his work, not. It is not personal gain or personal safety that a man must have in view if he goes to do battle, in however mistaken and foolish a way, against the oppression that has crushed the world for centuries and centuries. Do you not remember the answer given to the Czar by Michael Bestoujif when he was condemned? It was only the saying of a peasant; but it is one of the noblest ever heard in the world. 'I have the power to pardon you,' said the Czar to him, 'and I would do so if I thought you would become a faithful subject.' What was the answer? 'Sire,' said Michael Bestoujif, 'that is our great misfortune, that the Emperor can do everything, and that there is no law.'"

"Ah, the brave man!" said Natalie Lind, quickly and passionately, with a flash of pride in her eyes. "The brave man! If I had a brother, I would ask him, 'When will you show the courage of Michael Bestoujif?'"

Lord Evelyn glanced at her with a strange, admiring, proud look. "If she had a brother!" What else, even with all his admiration and affection for her, could he hope to be?

Presently they wandered back into other and lighter subjects; and Brand, at least, did not notice how the time was flying. When Natalie Lind rose, and asked her father whether he would have coffee sent into the smoking-room, or have tea in the drawing-room, Brand was quite astonished and disappointed to find it so late. He proposed that they should at once go up to the drawing-room; and this was done.

They had been speaking of musical instruments at dinner; and their host now brought them some venerable lutes to examine—curiosities only, for most of the metal strings were broken. Beautiful objects, however, they were, in inlaid ivory or tortoise-shell and ebony; made, as the various inscriptions revealed, at Bologna or Padua or Venice; and dating, some of them, as far back as 1474. But in the midst of all this, Brand espied another instrument on one of the small tables.

"Miss Lind," said he, with some surprise, "do you play the zither?"

"Oh yes, Natalie will play you something," her father said, carelessly; and forthwith the girl sat down to the small table.

George Brand retired into a corner of the room. He was passionately fond of zither music. He thought no more about that examination of the lutes.

"*Do you know one who can play the zither well?*" said the proverb. "*If so, rejoice, for there are not two in the world.*" However that might be, Natalie Lind could play the zither, as one eager listener soon discovered. He, in that far corner, could only see the profile of the girl (just touched with a faint red from the shade of the nearest candle, as she leaned over the instrument), and the shapely wrists and fingers as they moved on the metallic strings. But was that what he really did see when the first low tremulous notes struck the prelude to one of the old pathetic *Volkslieder* that many a time he had heard in the morning, when the fresh wind blew in from the pines; that many a time he had heard in the evening, when the little blue-eyed Käthchen and her mother sang together as they sat and knitted on the bench in front of the inn? Suddenly the air changes. What is this louder tramp? Is it not the joyous chorus of the home-returning huntsmen; the lads with the slain roe-deer slung round their necks; that stalwart Bavarian keeper hauling at his mighty black hound; old father Keinitz, with his three beagles and his ancient breech-loader, hurrying forwards to get the first cool, vast, splendid draught of the clear white wine? How the young fellows come swinging along through the dust, their faces ablaze against the sunset! Listen to the far, hoarse chorus!—

Dann kehr' ich von der Haide,
Zur häuslich stillen Freude,
Ein frommer Jägersmann!
Ein frommer Jägersmann!
Halli, hallo! halli, hallo!
Ein frommer Jägersmann!

White wine now, and likewise the richer red!—for there is a great hand-shaking because of the Mr. Englishman's good fortune in having shot three bucks; and the little Käthchen's eyes grow full, because they have brought home a gentle-faced doe, likewise cruelly slain. And Käthchen's mother has whisked inside; and here are the tall schoppen on the table; and speedily the long, low room is filled with the tobacco-smoke. What! another song, you thirsty old Keinitz, with the quavering voice? But there is a lusty chorus to that too; and a great clinking of glasses; and the Englishman laughs and does his part too, and he has called for six more schoppen of red. . . . But hush! now. Have we come out from the din and the smoke, to the cool evening air? What is that one hears afar in the garden? Surely it is the little Käthchen and her mother, singing together, in beautiful harmony, the old, familiar, tender *Loreley?* The zither is a strange instrument—it speaks. And when Natalie Lind, coming to this air, sang in a low contralto voice an only half-suggested second, it seemed to those in the room that two women were singing—the one with a voice low and rich and penetrating, the other voice clear and sweet like the singing of a young girl. *Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fliesset der Rhein.* Was it, indeed, Käthchen and her mother? Were they far away in the beautiful pine-land, with the quiet evening shining red over the green woods, and darkness coming over the pale streams in the hollows? When Natalie Lind ceased, the elder of the two guests murmured to himself, "Wonderful! wonderful!" The other did not speak, at all.

She rested her hands for a moment on the table.

"Natalushka," said her father, "is that all?"

"You must not call me Natalushka any longer, papa," said she; but again she bent her hands over the silver strings.

And these brighter and gayer airs now—surely they are from the laughing and light-hearted south? Have we not heard them under the cool shade of the olive trees; with the hot sun blazing on the garden paths of the Villa Reale; and the children playing; and the band busy with its dancing *canzoni;* the gay notes drowning the murmur and plash of the fountains near? Look now!—far beneath the grey shadow of the olive boughs—the deep blue band of the sea; and there the double-sailed barca, like a yellow butterfly, hovering on the water; and there the larger martingallo, bound for the cloud-like island on the horizon. Are they singing, then, as they speed over the glancing waves? . . . *O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!* . . . for what can they sing at all as they leave us if they do not sing the pretty, tender, tinkling "Santa Lucia"?

Venite all' agile
Barchetta mia!
Santa Lucia!
Santa Lucia!

. . . The notes grow fainter and fainter. Are the tall maidens of Capri already looking out for the swarthy sailors that these turn no longer to the shores they are leaving? . . , *O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!* . . . Fainter and fainter grow the notes on the trembling string, so that you can scarcely tell them from the cool plashing of the fountains . . . *Santa Lucia! . . . Santa Lucia!* . . .

"Natalushka," said her father, laughing, "you must take us to Venice now."

The young Hungarian girl rose, and put the zither aside.

"It is an amusement for children," she said.

She went to the piano, which was open, and took down a piece of music—it was Kücken's "Maid of Judah." Now, hitherto, George Brand had only heard her murmur a low, harmonious second to one or other of the airs she had been playing; and he was quite unprepared for the passion and fervour which her deep, resonant, contralto voice threw into this wail of indignation and despair. This was the voice of a woman, not of a girl; and it was with the proud passion of a woman that she seemed to send this cry to heaven for reparation and justice and revenge. And surely it was not only of the sorrows of the land of Judah she was thinking?—it was a wider cry—the cry of the oppressed and the suffering and heart-broken in every clime—

O blest native land! O fatherland mine!
How long for thy refuge in vain shall I pine?

He could have believed there were tears in her eyes just then; but there were none, he knew, when she came to the fierce and piteous appeal that followed—

Where, where are thy proud sons, so lordly in might?
All mown down and fallen in blood-welling fight!
Thy cities are ruin, thy valleys lie waste,
Their summer enchantment the foe hath erased.
O blest native land! how long shalt decline?
When, when will the Lord cry "REVENGE, IT IS MINE!"

The zither speaks; but there is a speech beyond that of the zither. The penetrating vibration of this rich and pathetic voice was a thing not easily to be forgotten. When the two friends left the house, they

found themselves in the chill darkness of an English night in February. Surely it must have seemed to them that they had been dwelling for a period in warmer climes, with gay colours and warmth and sweet sounds around them? They walked for some time in silence.

"Well," said Lord Evelyn, at last, "what do you think of them?"

"I don't know," said the other, after a pause. "I am puzzled. How did you come to know them?"

"I came to know Lind through a newspaper reporter called O'Halloran. I should like to introduce you to him too."

George Brand soon afterwards parted from his friend, and walked away down to his silent rooms over the river. The streets were dark and deserted, and the air was still; yet there seemed somehow to be a tremulous, passionate, distant sound in the night. It was no tinkling "Santa Lucia" dying away over the blue seas in the south. It was no dull, sonorous bell, suggesting memories of the far Campagna. Was it not rather the quick, responsive echo that had instantly arisen in his own heart, when he heard the thrilling voice of Natalie Lind pour forth that proud and indignant appeal—

"*When, when will the Lord cry 'REVENGE, IT IS MINE!'*"

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGER.

FERDINAND LIND was in his study, busy with his morning letters. It was a nondescript little den, which he also used as library and smoking-room; its chief feature being a collection of portraits—a most hetero-

geneous assortment of engravings, photographs, woodcuts, and terra-cotta busts. Wherever the book-shelves ceased, these began; and as there were a great number of them, and as the room was small, Mr. Lind's friends or historical heroes sometimes came into odd juxtaposition. In any case, they formed a strange assemblage —Arndt and Körner; Stein; Silvio Pellico and Karl Sand cheek by jowl; Pestal, Comte, Cromwell, Garibaldi, Marx, Mazzini, Bem, Kossuth, Lassalle, and many another writer and fighter. A fine engraving of Napoleon as First Consul was hung over the mantelpiece, a pipe-rack intervening between it and a facsimile of the warrant for the execution of Charles I.

Something in his correspondence had obviously annoyed the occupant of this little study. His brows were bent down, and he kept his foot nervously and impatiently tapping on the floor. When some one knocked, he said, "Come in!" almost angrily, though he must have known who was his visitor.

"Good morning, papa!" said the tall Hungarian girl, coming into the room with a light step and a smile of welcome on her face.

"Good morning, Natalie!" said he, without looking up. "I am busy this morning."

"Oh, but, papa," said she, going over, and stooping down and kissing him, "you must let me come and thank you for the flowers. They are more beautiful than ever this time."

"What flowers?" said he, impatiently.

"Why," she said, with a look of astonishment, "have you forgotten already? The flowers you always send for my birthday morning."

But instantly she changed her tone.

"Ah! I see. Good little children must not ask where the fairy gifts come from. There, I will not disturb you, papa."

She touched his shoulder caressingly as she passed.

"But thank you again, papa Santa Claus."

At breakfast, Ferdinand Lind seemed to have entirely recovered his good humour.

"I had forgotten for the moment it was your birthday, Natalie," said he. "You are quite a grown woman now."

Nothing, however, was said about the flowers, though the beautiful basket stood on a side-table, filling the room with its perfume. After breakfast, Mr. Lind left for his office, his daughter setting about her domestic duties.

At twelve o'clock she was ready to go out for her accustomed morning walk. The pretty little Anneli, her companion on these excursions, was also ready; and together they set forth. They chatted frankly together in German — the ordinary relations between mistress and servant never having been properly established in this case. For one thing, they had been left to depend on each other's society during many a long evening in foreign towns, when Mr. Lind was away on his own business. For another, Natalie Lind had, somehow or other, and quite unaided, arrived at the daring conclusion that servants were human beings; and she had been taught to regard human beings as her brothers and sisters, some more fortunate than others, no doubt, but the least fortunate having the greatest claim on her.

"Fräulein," said the little Saxon maid, "it was I myself who took in the beautiful flowers that came for you this morning."

"Yes?"

"Yes, indeed; and I thought it was very strange for a lady to be out so early in the morning."

"A lady!" said Natalie Lind, with a quick surprise. "Not dressed all in black?"

"Yes, indeed, she was dressed all in black."

The girl was silent for a second or two. Then she said, with a smile—

"It is not right for my father to send me a black messenger on my birthday—it is not a good omen. And it was the same last year when we were in Paris; the *concierge* told me. Birthday gifts should come with a white fairy, you know, Anneli—all silver and bells."

"Fräulein," said the little German girl, gravely, "I do not think the lady who came this morning would bring you any ill fortune, for she spoke with such gentleness when she asked about you."

"When she asked about me? What was she like, then, this black messenger?"

"How could I see, Fräulein?—her veil was so thick. But her hair was grey; I could see that. And she had a beautiful figure—not quite as tall as you, Fräulein; I watched her as she went away."

"I am not sure that it is safe, Anneli, to watch the people whom Santa Claus sends," the young mistress said, lightly. "However, you have not told me what the strange lady said to you."

"That will I now tell you, Fräulein," said the other, with an air of importance. "Well, when I heard the knock at the door, I went instantly; I thought it was strange to hear a knock so early, instead of the bell. Then there was the lady; and she did not ask who lived there, but she said, "Miss Lind is not up yet?" But then, Fräulein, you must understand, she did not

speak like that; for it was in English, and she spoke very slowly, as if it was with difficulty. I would have said, "Will the *gnädige Frau* be pleased to speak German?" but I was afraid it might be impertinent for a maidservant to address a lady so. Besides, Fräulein, she might have been a French lady, and not able to understand our German."

"Quite so, Anneli. Well?"

"Then I told her I believed you were still in your room. Then she said, still speaking very slowly, as if it was all learned, 'Will you be so kind as to put those flowers just outside her room, so that she will get them when she comes out?' And I said I would do that. Then she said, 'I hope Miss Lind is very well;' and I said, 'Oh yes.' She stood for a moment just then, Fräulein, as if not knowing whether to go away or not; and then she asked again if you were quite well and strong and cheerful, and again I said, 'Oh yes;' and no sooner had I said that than she put something into my hand and went away. Would you believe it, Fräulein? it was a sovereign—an English golden sovereign. And so I ran after her, and said, 'Lady, this is a mistake,' and I offered her the sovereign. That was right, was it not, Fräulein?"

"Certainly."

"Well, she did not speak to me at all this time. I think the poor lady had less English even than I myself; but she closed my hand over the sovereign, and then patted me on the arm, and went away. It was then that I looked after her. I said to myself, 'Well, there is only one lady that I know who has a more beautiful figure than that—that is my mistress.' But she was not so tall as you, Fräulein."

Natalie Lind paid no attention to this adroit piece of flattery on the part of her little Saxon maid.

"It is very extraordinary, Anneli," she said after a while; then she added, "I hope the piece of gold you have will not turn to dust and ashes."

"Look at it, Fräulein," said Anneli, taking out her purse and producing a sound and solid English coin, about which there appeared to be no demoniacism or witchcraft whatsoever.

They had by this time got into Park Lane; and here the young mistress's speculations about the mysterious messenger of Santa Claus were suddenly cut short, by something more immediate and more practical. There was a small boy of about ten engaged in pulling a wheelbarrow which was heavily laden with large baskets—probably containing washing; and he was toiling manfully with a somewhat hopeless task. How he had got so far it was impossible to say; but now that his strength was exhausted, he was trying all sorts of ineffectual dodges—even tilting up the barrow and endeavouring to haul it by the legs—to get the thing along.

"If I were a man," said Natalie Lind, "I would help that boy."

Then she stepped from the pavement.

"Little boy," she said, "where are you taking that barrow?"

The London *gamin*, always on the watch for sarcasm, stopped and stared at her. Then he took off his cap and wiped his forehead; it was warm work, though this was a chill February morning. Finally he said—

"Well, I'm agoin' to Warrington Crescent, Maida

Vale. 'But if it's when I am likely to git there—bust me if I know."

She looked about. There was a good, sturdy specimen of the London loafer over at the Park railings, with both hands up at his mouth, trying to light his pipe. She went across to him.

"I will give you half a crown if you will pull that barrow to Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale." There was no hesitation in her manner; she looked the loafer fair in the face.

He instantly took the pipe from his mouth, and made some slouching attempt at touching his cap.

"Thank ye, miss. Thank ye kindly"—and away the barrow went, with the small boy manfully pushing behind.

The tall, black-eyed Hungarian girl and her rosy-cheeked attendant now turned into the Park. There were a good many people riding by—fathers with their daughters, elderly gentlemen very correctly dressed, smart young men with a little tawny moustache, clear blue eyes, and square shoulders.

"Many of those Englishmen are very handsome," said the young mistress, by chance.

"Not like the Austrians, Fräulein," said Anneli.

"The Austrians? What do you know about the Austrians?" said the other, sharply.

"When my uncle was ill at Prague, Fräulein," the girl said, "my mother took me there to see him. We used to go out to the river, and go half-way over the tall bridge, and then down to the 'Sofien-Insel.' Ah, the beautiful place!—with the music, and the walks under the trees; and there we used to see the Austrian officers. These *were* handsome, with their beautiful

uniforms, and waists like a girl; and the beautiful gloves they wore, too!—even when they were smoking cigarettes."

Natalie Lind was apparently thinking of other things. She neither rebuked nor approved Anneli's speech; though it was hard that the little Saxon maid should have preferred to the sturdy, white-haired, fair-skinned warriors of her native land the elegant young gentlemen of Francis Joseph's army.

"They are handsome, those Englishmen," Natalie Lind was saying, almost to herself, "and very rich and brave; but they have no sympathy. All their fighting for their own liberty is over and gone; they cannot believe there is any oppression now anywhere; and they think that those who wish to help the sufferers of the world are only discontented and fanatic—a trouble—an annoyance. And they are hard with the poor people and the weak; they think it is wrong—that you have done wrong—if you are not well off and strong like themselves. I wonder if that was really an English lady who wrote the 'Cry of the Children.'"

"I beg your pardon, Fräulein?"

"Nothing, Anneli. I was wondering why so rich a nation as the English should have so many poor people amongst them—and such miserable poor people; there is nothing like it in the world."

They were walking along the broad road leading to the Marble Arch, between the leafless trees. Suddenly the little Saxon girl exclaimed, in an excited whisper—

"Fräulein! Fräulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

"The lady—the lady who came with the flowers—she is behind us. Yes; I am sure."

The girl's mistress glanced quickly round. Some distance behind them there was certainly a lady dressed altogether in black, who, the moment she perceived that these two were regarding her, turned aside, and pretended to pick up something from the grass.

"Fräulein, Fräulein," said Anneli, eagerly; "let us sit down on this seat. Do not look at her. She will pass."

The sudden presence of this stranger, about whom she had been thinking so much, had somewhat unnerved her; she obeyed this suggestion almost mechanically; and waited with her heart throbbing. For an instant or two it seemed as if that dark figure along by the trees were inclined to turn and leave; but presently Natalie Lind knew rather than saw that this slender and graceful woman with the black dress and the deep veil was approaching her. She came nearer; for a second she came closer; some little white thing was dropped into the girl's lap, and the stranger passed quickly on.

"Anneli, Anneli," the young mistress said, "the lady has dropped her locket! Run with it—quick!"

"No, Fräulein," said the other, quite as breathlessly, "she meant it for you. Oh, look, Fräulein! —look at the poor lady—she is crying."

The sharp eyes of the younger girl were right. Surely that slender figure was being shaken with sobs as it hurried away and was lost among the groups coming through the Marble Arch? Natalie Lind sat

there as one stupefied—breathless, silent, trembling. She had not looked at the locket at all.

"Anneli," she said, in a low voice, "was that the same lady? Are you sure?"

"Certain, Fräulein," said her companion, eagerly.

"She must be very unhappy," said the girl. "I think, too, she was crying."

Then she looked at the trinket that the stranger had dropped into her lap. It was an old-fashioned silver locket, formed in the shape of a heart, and ornamented with the most delicate filagree work; in the centre of it was the letter N in old German text. When Natalie Lind opened it, she found inside only a small piece of paper, on which was written, in foreign-looking characters, "*From Natalie to Natalushka.*"

"Anneli, she knows my name!" the girl exclaimed.

"Would you not like to speak to the poor lady, Fräulein?" said the little German maid, who was very much excited also. "And do you not think she is sure to come this way again—to-morrow, next day, some other day? Perhaps she is ill or suffering, or she may have lost some one whom you resemble—how can one tell?"

CHAPTER V.

PIONEERS.

BEFORE sitting down to breakfast on this dim and dreary morning in February, George Brand went to one of the windows of his sitting-room and looked abroad on the busy world without. Busy indeed it seemed to be—the steamers hurrying up and down

the river, hansoms whirling along the Embankment, heavily laden omnibuses chasing each other across Waterloo Bridge, the underground railway from time to time rumbling beneath those wintry-looking gardens, and always and everywhere the ceaseless murmur of a great city. In the midst of all this eager activity, he was only a spectator. Busy enough the world around him seemed to be; he alone was idle.

Well what had he to look forward to on this dull day, when once he had finished his breakfast and his newspapers? It had already began to drizzle; there was to be no saunter up to the Park. He would stroll along to his club, and say "Good morning" to one or two acquaintances. Perhaps he would glance at some more newspapers. Perhaps, tired of reading news that did not interest, and forming opinions never to be translated into action, he would take refuge in the library. Somehow, anyhow, he would desperately tide over the morning till lunch-time.

Luncheon would be a break; but after——? He had not been long enough in England to become familiar with the whist-set; similarly, he had been too long abroad to be proficient in English billiards, even if he had been willing to make either whist or pool the pursuit of his life. As for afternoon calls and tea-drinking, that may be an interesting occupation for young gentlemen in search of a wife, but it is too ghastly a business for one who has no such views. What, then? More newspapers? More tedious lounging in the hushed library? Or how were the "impracticable hours" to be disposed of before came night and sleep?

George Brand did not stay to consider that, when

a man in the prime of health and vigour, possessed of an ample fortune, unfettered by anybody's will but his own, and burdened by neither remorse nor regret, nevertheless begins to find life a thing too tedious to be borne, there must be a cause for it. On the contrary, instead of asking himself any questions, he set about getting through his daily programme with an Englishman's determination to be prepared for the worst. He walked up to his club, the Waldegrave, in Pall Mall. In the morning-room there were only two or three old gentlemen, seated in easy-chairs near the fire, and grumbling in a loud voice—for apparently one or two were rather deaf — about the weather. Brand glanced at a few more newspapers. Then a happy idea occurred to him; he would go up to the smoking-room and smoke a cigarette.

In this vast hall of a place there were only two persons—one standing with his back to the fire, the other lying back in an easy-chair. The one was a florid, elderly gentleman, who was first cousin to a junior Lord of the Treasury, and therefore claimed to be a profound authority on politics, home and foreign. He was a harmless poor devil enough, from whom a merciful Providence had concealed the fact that his brain-power was of the smallest. His companion, reclining in the easy-chair, was a youthful Fine Art Professor; an epicene creature; a bundle of languid affectations, with the added and fluttering self-consciousness of a school-miss. He was absently assenting to the propositions of the florid gentleman; but it is probable that his soul was elsewhere.

These propositions were to the effect that leading articles in a newspaper were a mere impertinence;

that he himself never read such things; that the business of a newspaper was to supply news; and that an intelligent Englishman was better capable of forming a judgment on public affairs than the hacks of a newspaper-office. This intelligent Englishman then proceeded to deliver his own judgment on the question of the day, which turned out to be—to Mr. Brand's great surprise—nothing more nor less than a blundering and inaccurate *résumé* of the opinions expressed in a leading article in that morning's *Times*. At length this one-sided conversation between a jackass and a jackanapes became too intolerable for Brand, who threw away his cigarette and descended once more into the hall.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir," said a boy; and at the same moment he caught sight of Lord Evelyn.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward to shake his friend by the hand. "Come, Evelyn, what are you up to? I can't stand England any longer; will you take a run with me?—Algiers, Egypt, anywhere you like. Let us drop down to Dover in the afternoon, and settle it there. Or what do you say to the Riviera? we should be sure to run against some people at one or other of the towns. Upon my life, if you had not turned up, I think I should have cut my throat before lunch-time."

"I have got something better for you to do than that," said the other; "I want you to see O'Halloran. Come along; I have a hansom here. We shall just catch him at Atkinson's, the book-shop, you know."

"Very well; all right," Brand said, briskly: this seemed to be rather a more cheerful business than cutting one's throat.

"He's at his telegraph-wire all night," Lord Evelyn said, in the hansom. "Then he lies down for a few hours' sleep on a sofa. Then he goes along to his rooms in Pimlico for breakfast; but at Atkinson's he generally stops for a while on his way, to have his morning drink."

"Oh, is that the sort of person?"

"Don't make any mistake. O'Halloran may be eccentric in his ways of living, but he is one of the most remarkable men I have ever run against. His knowledge, his reading—politics, philosophy, everything, in short—the brilliancy of his talking when he gets excited, even the extraordinary variety of his personal acquaintance,—why, there is nothing going on that he does not know about."

"But why has this Hibernian genius done nothing at all?"

"Why? You might as well try to build a house with a flash of lightning. He has more political knowledge and more power of brilliant writing than half the editors in London put together; but he would ruin any paper in twenty-four hours. His first object would probably be to frighten his readers out of their wits by some monstrous paradox; his next to show them what fools they had been. I don't know how he has been kept on so long where he is, unless it be that he deals with news only. I believe he had to be withdrawn from the Gallery of the House; he was very impatient over the prosy members, and his remarks about them began to reach the Speaker's ear too frequently."

"I gather, then, that he is merely a clever, idle, Irish vagabond, who drinks."

"He does not drink. And as for his Irish name, I suppose he must be Irish either by descent or birth; but he is continually abusing Ireland and the Irish. Probably, however, he would not let anybody else do so."

Mr. Atkinson's book-shop in the Strand was a somewhat dingy-looking place, filled with publications mostly of an exceedingly advanced character. Mr. Atkinson himself claimed to be a bit of a reformer; and had indeed brought himself on one or two occasions within reach of the law by issuing pamphlets of a somewhat too fearless aim. On this occasion he was not in the shop; so the two friends passed through, ascended a dark little stair, and entered a room which smelt strongly of tobacco-smoke.

The sole occupant of this chamber, to whom Brand was immediately introduced, was a man of about fifty, carelessly if not even shabbily dressed, with large masses of unkempt hair, and eyes, dark grey, deep-set, that had very markedly the look of the eyes of a lion. The face was worn and pallid; but when lit up with excitement, it was capable of much expression; and Mr. O'Halloran, when he did become excited, got very much excited indeed. He had laid aside his pipe, and was just finishing his gin and soda-water, taken from Mr. Atkinson's private store.

However, the lion so seldom roars when it is expected to roar. Instead of the extraordinary creature whom Lord Evelyn had been describing, Brand found merely an Irish newspaper-reporter, who was either tired, or indifferent, or sleepy. They talked about some current topic of the hour for a few minutes; and then Mr. O'Halloran, with a yawn, rose and said he must go home for breakfast.

"Stay a bit, O'Halloran," Lord Evelyn said, in despair; "I—I wanted—the fact is, Mr. Brand has been asking me about Ferdinand Lind——"

"Oh," said the bushy-headed man, with a quick glance of scrutiny at the tall Englishman. "No, no," he added, with a smile, addressing himself directly to Brand. "It is no use your touching anything of that kind. You would want to know too much. You would want to have the earth dug away from over the catacombs, before you went below to follow a solitary guide with a bit of candle. You could never be brought to understand that the cardinal principle of all secret societies has been that obedience is an end and aim in itself, and faith the chiefest of all the virtues. You wouldn't take anything on trust; you have the pure English temperament."

Brand laughed, and said nothing. But O'Halloran sat down again; and began to talk in an idle haphazard sort of fashion of the various secret societies, religious, social, political, that had become known to the world; and of their aims, and their working, and how they had so often fallen away into the mere preservation of mummeries, or declared themselves only by the commission of useless deeds of revenge.

"Ah," said Brand, promptly, "that is precisely what I have been urging on Lord Evelyn. How can you know in joining such an association that you are not becoming the accomplices of men who are merely planning assassination? And what good can come of that? How are you likely to gain anything by the dagger? The great social and political changes of the world come in tides; you can neither retard them nor help them by sticking pins in the sand."

"I am not so sure," said the other, doubtfully. "A little wholesome terrorism has sometimes played its part. The 1868 amnesty to the Poles in Siberia was not so long after—not more than a year after, I think —that little business of Berezowski. Faith, what a chance that man had!"

"Who?"

"Berezowski," said he, with an air of contemplation. "Two Emperors in one carriage; and he had two shots at them! Well, well, Orsini succeeded better."

"Succeeded?" said George Brand, in simple amazement. "Do you call that success? He had the reward that he richly merited, at all events."

"You do not think he was successful?" the other said, calmly. "Then you forget how the kingdom of Italy came by its liberty. Who do you think was the founder of that kingdom of Italy—which God preserve till it become something better than a kingdom! Not Cavour, with all his wiliness; not your Galantuomo, the warrior who wrote up Aspromonte in the face of all the world as the synonym for the gratitude of kings; not Garibaldi, who, in spite of Aspromonte, has become now merely the *concierge* to the House of Savoy. The founder of the kingdom of Italy was Felix Orsini!—and whether heaven or hell contains him, I drink his health."

He suited the action to the word. Brand looked on, not much impressed by what he considered a mere piece of bravado.

"That is all nonsense, O'Halloran," Lord Evelyn said, bluntly.

"I tell you," O'Halloran said, with some vehemence, "that the 14th of January, 1858, kept Louis Napoleon

in such a state of tremor, that he would have done a good deal more than lend his army to Sardinia to sweep the Austrians out rather than abandon himself to the fate that Cavour plainly and distinctly indicated. But for the threat of another dose of Orsini pills, do you think you would ever have heard of Magenta and Solferino?"

He seemed to rouse himself a bit now.

"No," he said, "I do not approve of assassination as a political weapon. It seldom answers. But it has always been the policy of absolute governments, and of their allies the priests and the police, to attribute any murders that might occur to the secret societies, and so to terrify stupid people. It is one of the commonest slanders in history. Why, everybody knows how Fouché humbugged the First Napoleon; and got up vague plots to prove that he, and he alone, knew what was going on. When Karl Sand killed Kotzebue—oh, of course, that was a fine excuse for the German kings and princes to have another raid against free speech, though Sand declared he had nothing in the world to do with either the Tugendbund or any such society. Who now believes that Young Italy killed Count Rossi? Rossi was murdered by the agents of the clericals; it was distinctly proved. But any stick is good enough to beat a dog with. No matter what the slander is, so long as you can get up a charge, either for the imprisoning of a dangerous enemy or for terrifying the public mind. You yourself, Mr. Brand—I can see that your only notion of the various secret societies now in Europe is that they will probably assassinate people. That's what they said about the Carbonari, too. The objects of the Carbonari were plain as plain could be;

but no sooner had General Pepe kicked out Ferdinand and put in a constitutional monarch, than Austria must needs attribute every murder that was committed to those detestable Carbonari, so that she could call upon Prussia and Russia to join her in strangling the infant liberties of Europe. You see, we can't get at those Royal slanderers. We can get at a man like Sir James Graham, when we force him to apologize in the House of Commons for having said that Mazzini instigated the assassination of the spies Emiliani and Lazzareschi."

"But, good heavens," exclaimed Brand, "does anybody doubt that that was a political double murder?"

O'Halloran shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"You may call it murder if you like; others might call it a fitting punishment. But all I was asking you to do was to remove from your mind that bugbear that the autocratic governments of Europe have created for their own uses. No secret society—if you except those Nihilists, who appear to have gone mad altogether—I say, no secret society of the present day recognizes political assassination as a normal or desirable weapon; though it may have to be resorted to in extreme cases. You, as an individual, might, in certain circumstances, lawfully kill a man; but that is neither the custom, nor the object, nor the chief thought of your life."

"And there are many of these societies?" Brand asked.

O'Halloran had carelessly lit himself another pipe.

"More than some people suspect. They are growing in secret as rapidly as some kindred societies are growing in the open. Look at the German socialists—in 1871, they polled only 120,000 votes; in 1874, they polled 340,000: I imagine that Herr Fürst von Bis-

marck will find some difficulty in surpressing that Frankenstein monster he coquetted so long with. Then the Knights of Labour in America: you will hear something of them by-and-by, or I am mistaken. In secret and in the open alike there is a vast power growing and growing, increasing in volume and bulk from hour to hour, from year to year; God only knows in what fashion it will reveal itself. But you may depend on it that when the spark does spring out of the cloud—when the clearance of the atmosphere is due—people will look back on 1688, and 1798, and 1848 as mere playthings. The Great Revolution is still to come; it may be nearer than some imagine."

He had grown more earnest, both in his manner and his speech.

"Well," George Brand said, "timid people may reassure themselves. Where there are so many societies, there will be as many different aims. Some, like the wilder German socialists, will want a general participation of property; others a demolition of the churches and crucifixion of the priests; others the establishment of a Universal Republic. There may be a great deal of powder stored up, but it will all go off in different directions, in little fireworks."

A quick light gleamed in those deep-set, lion-like eyes.

"Very well said!" was the scornful comment. "The Czar himself could not have expressed his belief, or at least his hope, more concisely. But let me tell you, sir, that the masses of mankind are not such hopeless idiots as are some of the orators and writers who speak for them; and that you will appeal to them in vain if you do not appeal to their sense of justice, and their

belief in right, and in the eternal laws of God. You may have a particular crowd go mad, or a particular city go mad; but the heart of the people beats true; and if you desire a great political change, you must appeal to their love of fair and honest dealing as between man and man. And even if the aims of these societies are diverse, what then? What would you think, now, if it were possible to construct a common platform, where certain aims at least could be accepted by all, and become bonds to unite those who are hoping for better things all over the earth? What would you think if it were possible, out of such co-operation, to form a great and powerful organization for the compelling of peace, the teaching of the first principles of freedom, and co-operation, and public justice, the giving the poorer of the earth at last a chance of reaping the reward of their own labour? That did not occur to you as a possible thing, perhaps? You have only studied the ways of kings and governments; each one for himself. 'Come over my boundary, and I will cleave your head; or rather, I will send my common people to do it, for a little blood-letting from time to time is good for that vile and ignorant body.' But the vile and ignorant body may begin to tire of that recurrent blood-letting, and might perhaps even say, 'Brother across the boundary, I have no quarrel with you. You are poor and ignorant like myself; the travail of the earth lies hard on you; I would rather give you my hand. If I have any quarrel, surely it is with the tyrants of the earth, who have kept both you and me enslaved; who have taken away our children from us; who have left us scarcely bread. How long, O Lord, how long? We are tired of the reign of Cæsar; we are

beaten down with it; who will help us now to establish the reign of Christ?'"

He rose. Despite the unkempt hair, this man looked quite handsome now, while this serious look was in his face. Brand began to perceive whence his friend Evelyn had derived at least some of his inspiration.

"Meanwhile," O'Halloran said, with a light, scornful laugh, "Christianity has been of excellent service to Cæsar; it has been the big policeman of Europe. Do you think these poor wretches would have been so patient if they had not believed there was some compensation reserved for them beyond the grave? They would have had Cæsar by the throat by this time."

"Then that scheme of co-operation you mentioned," Brand said—somewhat hastily, for he saw that O'Halloran was about to leave—"that is what Ferdinand Lind is working at?"

The other started.

"I cannot give you any information on that point," said O'Halloran, gravely. "And I do not think you are likely to get much anywhere if you are only moved by curiosity, however sympathetic and well-wishing."

He took up his hat and stick.

"Good-bye, Mr. Brand," said he; and he looked at him with a kindly look. "As far as I can judge you are now in the position of a man at a partly opened door, half afraid to enter, and too curious to draw back. Well, my advice to you is—Draw back. Or at least remember this: that before you enter that room you must be without doubt—*and without fear*."

CHAPTER VI.

BON VOYAGE!

FEAR he had none. His life was not so valuable to him that he would have hesitated about throwing himself into any forlorn hope, provided that he was satisfied of the justice of the cause. He had dabbled a little in philosophy, and not only believed that the ordinary altruistic instincts of mankind could be traced to a purely utilitarian origin, but also that, on the same theory, the highest form of personal gratification might be found in the severest form of self-sacrifice. He did not pity a martyr; he envied him. But before the martyr's joy must come the martyr's faith. Without that enthusiastic belief in the necessity and nobleness and value of the sacrifice, what could there be but physical pain and the despair of a useless death?

But if he had no fear, he had a super-abundance of doubt. He had not at all the pliable, receptive, imaginative nature of his friend, Lord Evelyn. He had more than the ordinary Englishman's distrust of secrecy. He was not to be won over by the visions of any St. Simon, the eloquence of any Fourier, the epigrams of any Proudhon: these were to him but intellectual playthings, of no practical value. It was, doubtless, a novelty for a young man brought up as Lord Evelyn had been to associate with a gin-drinking Irish reporter, and to regard him as the mysterious apostle of a new creed; Brand only saw in O'Halloran a light-headed, speculative, talkative person, as safe to trust to for guidance as a will-o'-the-wisp. It is true that for the time being he had been thrilled by the passion-

ate fervour of Natalie Lind's singing; and many a time since he could have fancied that he heard in the stillness of the night that pathetic and vibrating appeal—

"When, when will the Lord cry 'REVENGE IT IS MINE!'"

But he dissociated her from her father's schemes altogether. No doubt she was moved by the generous enthusiasm of a young girl. She had a warm, human, sympathetic heart; the cry of the poor and the suffering appealed to her; and she was confident in the success of projects of which she had been prudently kept ignorant. This was George Brand's reading. He would not have Natalie Lind associated with Leicester Square and a lot of garlic-eating revolutionaries.

"But who is this man Lind?" he asked, impatiently, of Lord Evelyn: he had driven up to his friend's house in Clarges Street; had had luncheon with him; and they were now smoking a cigarette in the library.

"You mean his nationality?" said his friend, laughing. "That has puzzled me, too. He seems, at all events, to have had his finger in a good many pies. He escaped into Turkey with Bem, I know; and he has been imprisoned in Russia; and once or twice I have heard him refer to the amnesty that was proclaimed when Louis Napoleon was presented with an heir. But whether he is Pole, or Jew, or Slav, there is no doubt about his daughter being a thorough Hungarian."

"Not the least," said Brand, with decision. "I have seen lots of women of that type in Pesth. And in Vienna too—if you are walking in the Prater you can always tell the Hungarian women as they drive past. But you rarely see one as beautiful as she is."

After a while Lord Evelyn said—

This is Natalie's birthday. By-and-by I am going along to Bond Street to buy some little thing for her."

"Then she allows you to make her presents?" Brand said, somewhat coldly.

"She and I are like brother and sister now," said the pale, deformed lad, without hesitation. "If I were ill, I think she would be glad to come and look after me."

"You have already plenty of sisters who would do that."

"By the way, they are coming to town next week, with my mother. You must come and dine with us some night, if you are not afraid to face the chatter of such a lot of girls."

"Have they seen Miss Lind?"

"No; not yet."

"And how will you explain your latest craze to them, Evelyn? They are very nice girls indeed, you know; but—but—when they set full cry on you—— I suppose some day I shall have to send them a copy of a newspaper from abroad, with this kind of thing in it: '*Compeered yesterday before the Correctional Tribunal, Ernest Francis D'Agincourt, Baron Evelyn, charged with having in his possession two canisters of an explosive compound and fourteen empty missiles. Further, among the correspondence of the accused was found——*'"

"'*A letter from an Englishman named Brand,*'" continued Lord Evelyn, as he rose and went to the window, "'*apparently written under the influence of nightmare.*' Come, Brand, I see the carriage is below. Will you drive with me to the jeweller's?"

"Certainly," said his friend; and at this moment

the carriage was announced. "I suppose it wouldn't do for me to buy the thing? You know I have more money to spend on trinkets than you have."

They were very intimate friends indeed. Lord Evelyn only said, with a smile—

"I am afraid Natalie wouldn't like it."

But this choosing of a birthday present was a terrible business. The jeweller was as other jewellers; his designs were mostly limited to the representation of two objects—a butterfly for a woman, and a horseshoe for a man. At last Brand, who had been walking about from time to time, espied, in a distant case, an object which instantly attracted his attention. It was a flat piece of wood or board, covered with blue velvet; and on this had been twined an unknown number of yards of the beautiful thread-like gold chain, common to the jewellers' shop-windows in Venice.

"Here you are, Evelyn," Brand said at once. "Why not buy a lot of this thin chain, and let her make it into any sort of decoration that she chooses?"

"It is an ignominious way out of the difficulty," said the other: but he consented; and yard after yard of the thread-like chain was unrolled. When allowed to drop together, it seemed to go into no compass at all.

They went outside.

"What are you going to do now, Brand?"

The other was looking cheerless enough.

"I?" he said, with the slightest possible shrug. "I suppose I must go down to the club, and yawn away the time till dinner."

"Then why not come with me? I have a commission or two from my sisters—one as far out as Notting Hill; but after that we can drive back through

the Park and call on the Linds. I dare say Lind will be home by that time."

Lord Evelyn's friend was more than delighted. As they drove from place to place, he was a good deal more talkative than was his wont; and among other things confessed his belief that Ferdinand Lind seemed much too hard-headed a man to be engaged in mere visionary enterprises. But somehow the conversation generally came round to Mr. Lind's daughter; and Brand seemed very anxious to find out to what degree she was cognizant of her father's schemes. On this point Lord Evelyn knew nothing.

At last they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and found Mr. Lind just on the point of entering. He stayed to receive them; went upstairs with them to the drawing-room; and then begged them to excuse him for a few minutes. Presently Natalie Lind appeared.

How this man envied his friend Evelyn the frank, sister-like way in which she took the little present, and thanked him for that and his kind wishes!

"Ah, do you know," she said, "what a strange birthday gift I had given me this morning! See!"

She brought over the old-fashioned silver locket, and told them the whole story.

"Is it not strange?" she said. "'*From Natalie to Natalushka.*' That is, from myself to myself: what can it mean?"

"Have you not asked your father, then, about his mysterious messenger?" Brand said; he was always glad to ask this girl a question, for she looked him so straight in the face with her soft dark eyes, as she answered.

"He has only now come home. I will directly."

"But why does your father call you Natalushka, Natalie?" asked Lord Evelyn.

There was the slightest blush on the pale, clear face.

"It was a nickname they gave me, I am told, when I was a child. They used to make me angry."

"And now, if one were to call you Natalushka?"

"My anger would be too terrible," she said, with a smile. "Papa alone dares to do that."

Presently her father came into the room.

"Oh, papa," said she, "I have discovered who the lady is whom you got to bring me the flowers. And see! she has given me this strange little locket. Look at the inscription—'*From Natalie to Natalushka.*'"

Lind only glanced at the locket. His eyes were fixed on the girl.

"Where did you see the—the lady?" he asked, coldly.

"In the Park. But she did not stay a moment, or speak; she hurried on, and Anneli thought she was crying. I almost think so too. Who was it, papa? May I speak to her if I see her again?"

Mr. Lind turned aside for a moment. Brand, who was narrowly watching him, was convinced that the man was in a passion of rage. But when he turned again he was outwardly calm.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Natalie," he said, in measured tones. "I have warned you before against making indiscriminate acquaintances; and Anneli, if she is constantly getting such stupidities into her head, must be sent about her business. I do not wish to hear anything more about it. Will you ring and ask why tea has not been sent up?"

The girl silently obeyed. Her father had never

spoken to her in this cold, austere tone before. She sat down at a small table, apart.

Mr. Lind talked for a minute or two with his guests; then he said—

"Natalie, you have the zither there; why do you not play us something?"

She turned to the small instrument, and, after a second or two, played a few notes. That was all. She rose and said, "I don't think I can play this afternoon, papa;" and then she left the room.

Mr. Lind pretended to converse with his guests as before; and tea came in; but presently he begged to be excused for a moment, and left the room. George Brand rose, and took a turn or two up and down.

"It would take very little," he muttered—for his teeth were set—"to make me throw that fellow out of the window."

"What do you mean?" Lord Evelyn said, in great surprise.

"Didn't you see? She left the room to keep from crying. That miserable Polish cut-throat—I should like to kick him downstairs!"

But at this moment the door opened; and father and daughter entered, arm-in-arm. Natalie's face was a little bit flushed; but she was very gentle and affectionate; they had made up that brief misunderstanding, obviously. And she had brought in her hand a mob-cap of black satin; would Lord Evelyn allow her to try the effect of twisting those beautiful golden threads through it?

"Natalushka," said her father, with great good humour, "it is your birthday. Do you think you could

persuade Lord Evelyn and Mr. Brand to come to your dinner-party?"

It was then explained to the two gentlemen that on this great anniversary it was the custom of Mr. Lind, when in London, to take his daughter to dine at some French or Italian restaurant in Regent Street or thereabouts. In fact, she liked to play at being abroad for an hour or two; to see around her foreign faces, and hear foreign tongues.

"I am afraid you will say that it is very easy to remind yourself of the Continent," said Mr. Lind, smiling—"that you have only to go to a place where they give you oily food and bad wine."

"On the contrary," said Brand, "I should think it very difficult in London to imagine yourself in a foreign town; for London is drained. However I accept the invitation with pleasure."

"And I," said Lord Evelyn. "Now must we be off to dress?"

"Not at all," said Natalie. "Do you not understand that you are abroad, and walking into a restaurant to dine? And now I will play you a little invitation—not to dinner; for you must suppose you have dined—and you come out on the stairs of the hotel, and step into the black gondola."

She went along to the small table, and sat down to the zither. There were a few notes of prelude; and then they heard the beautiful low voice added to the soft tinkling sounds. What did they vaguely make out from that melodious murmur of Italian?

Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!

The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

Lascia l'amico tetto
Vien meco a navigar!

Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens —See, O the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

Ai raggi della luna
Vien meco a navigar!

Where were they? Surely they have passed out from the darkness of the narrow canal; and are away on the broad bosom of the lagoon. The Place of St. Mark is all aglow with its golden points of fire; the yellow radiance spreads out into the night. And that other wandering mass of gold—the gondola hung round with lamps, and followed by a dark procession through the silence of the waters: does not the music come from thence? Listen, now!—

Sull'onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!

Can they hear the distant chorus, in there at the shore, where the people are walking about in the golden glare of the lamps?

Vien meco a navigar!
Vien meco a navigar!

Or can some faint echo be carried away out to yonder island, where the pale blue-white radiance of the moonlight is beginning to touch the tall dome of San Giorgio?

———a navigar!
———a navigar!

"It seems to me," said Lord Evelyn, when the girl rose, with a smile on her face, "that you do not need to go into Regent Street when you want to imagine yourself abroad."

Natalie looked at her watch.

"If you will excuse me, I will go and get ready now."

Well, they went to the big foreign restaurant; and had a small table all to themselves, in the midst of the glare, and the heat, and the indiscriminate Babel of tongues. And under the guidance of Mr. Brand, they adventured upon numerous articles of food which were more varied in their names than in their flavour; and they tasted some of the compounds, reeking of orris-root, that the Neapolitans call wine, until they fell back on a flask of Chianti, and were content; and they regarded their neighbours, and were regarded in turn. In the midst of it all, Mr. Lind, who had been somewhat preoccupied, said suddenly—

"Natalie, can you start with me for Leipsic to-morrow afternoon?"

She was as prompt as a soldier.

"Yes, papa. Shall I take Anneli, or not?"

"You may if you like."

After that George Brand seemed to take very little interest in this heterogeneous banquet; he stared absently at the foreign-looking people, at the hurrying waiters, at the stout lady behind the bar. Even when Mr. Lind told his daughter that her black satin mob-cap, with its wonderful intertwistings of Venetian chain, looked very striking in a mirror opposite, and when Lord Evelyn eagerly gave his friend the credit of having selected that birthday gift, he did not seem to pay much heed. When, after all was over, and he

had wished Natalie "Bon voyage" at the door of the brougham, Lord Evelyn said to him—

"Come along to Clarges Street now and smoke a cigar."

"No, thanks," he said. "I think I will stroll down to my rooms now."

"What is the matter with you, Brand? You have been looking very glum."

"Well, I have been thinking that London is a depressing sort of place for a man to live in who does not know many people. It is very big; and very empty. I don't think I shall be able to stand it much longer."

CHAPTER VII.

IN SOLITUDE.

A BLUSTERING, cold morning in March; the skies lowering; the wind increasing; and heavy showers being driven up from time to time from the black and threatening south-west. This was strange weather to make a man think of going to the sea-side; and of all places at the sea-side, to Dover; and of all places in Dover, to the Lord Warden Hotel, which was sure to be filled with fear-stricken foreigners, waiting for the sea to calm. Waters, as he packed the small portmanteau, could not at all understand this freak on the part of his master.

"If Lord Evelyn calls, sir," he said at the station, "when shall I say you will be back?"

"In a few days, perhaps. I don't know."

He had a compartment to himself; and away the train went through the wet and foggy country, with

the rain pouring down the panes of the carriage. The dismal prospect outside, however, did not matter much to this solitary traveller. He turned his back to the window, and read all the way down.

At Dover the outlook was still more dismal. A dirty, yellow-brown sea was rolling heavily in, springing white along the Admiralty Pier; gusts of rain were sweeping along the thoroughfare between the station and the hotel; in the hotel itself the rooms were occupied by a miscellaneous collection of dissatisfied folk, who aimlessly read the advertisements in Bradshaw, or stared through the dripping windows at the yellow waves outside. This was the condition of affairs when George Brand took up his residence there. He was quite alone; but he had a sufficiency of books with him; and so deeply engaged was he with these, that he let the ordinary coffee-room discussions about the weather pass absolutely unheeded.

On the second morning a number of the travellers plucked up heart of grace, and embarked, though the weather was still squally. George Brand was not in the least interested as to the speculations of those who remained about the possibilities of the passage. He drew his chair towards the fire, and relapsed into his reading.

This day, however, was varied by his making the acquaintance of a little old French lady, which he did by means of her two granddaughters, Josephine and Véronique. Véronique, having been pushed by Josephine, stumbled against Mr. Brand's knee, and would inevitably have fallen into the fireplace had he not caught her. Thereupon the little old lady, hurrying across the room, and looking very much inclined to box the ears

of both Josephine and Véronique, most profusely apologized, in French, to Monsieur. Monsieur, replying in that tongue, said it was of no consequence whatever. Then Madame, greatly delighted at finding some one, not a waiter, to whom she could speak in her own language, continued the conversation, and very speedily made Monsieur the confidant of all her hopes and fears about that terrible business the Channel passage. No doubt, Monsieur was also waiting for this dreadful storm to abate?

Monsieur quickly perceived that so long as this voluble little old lady—who was as yellow as a frog, and had beady black eyes, but whose manner was exceedingly charming—chose to attach herself to him, his pursuit of knowledge was not likely to be attended with much success, so he shut the book on his finger, and pleasantly said to her—

"Oh no, Madame. I am only waiting here for some friends."

Madame was greatly alarmed: surely they would not cross in such frightful weather? Monsieur ventured to think it was not so very bad. Then the little French lady glanced out at the window, and threw up her hands, and said with a shudder—

"Frightful! Truly frightful! What should I do with those two little ones ill, and myself ill? The sea might sweep them away."

Mr. Brand, having observed something of the manners of Josephine and Véronique, was inwardly of opinion that the sea might be worse employed; but what he said was—

"You could take a deck-cabin, Madame."

Madame again shuddered.

"Your friends are English, no doubt, Monsieur: the English are not so much afraid of storms."

"No, Madame, they are not English; but I do not think they would let such a day as this, for example, hinder them. They are not likely, however, to be on their way back for a day or two. To-morrow I may run over to Calais just on the chance of crossing with them again."

Here was a mad Englishman, to be sure! When people, driven by dire necessity, had their heart in their mouth at the very notion of encountering that rough sea, here was a person who thought of crossing and returning for no reason on earth—a trifling compliment to his friends—a pleasure excursion—a break in the monotony of the day!

"And I shall be pleased to look after the little ones, Madame," said he, politely, "if you are going over."

Madame thanked him very profusely; but assured him that so long as the weather looked so stormy she could not think of entrusting Josephine and Véronique to the mercy of the waves.

Now, if George Brand had little hope of meeting his friends that day, he acted pretty much as if he were expecting some one. First of all, he had secured a saloon-carriage in the afternoon mail-train to London —an unnecessary luxury for a bachelor well accustomed to the hardships of travel. Then he had managed to procure a handsome bouquet of freshly cut flowers. Finally there was some mysterious arrangement by which fruit, cakes, tea, and wine were to be ready at a moment's notice in the event of that saloon-carriage being required.

Then, as soon as the rumour went through the hotel that the vessel was in sight, away he went down the pier, with his coat-collar tightly buttoned, and his hat jammed down. What a toy-looking thing the steamer was, away out there in the mists of the rain, with the brown line of smoke stretching back to the horizon! She was tossing and rolling a good deal among the brown waves; he almost hoped his friends were not on board. And he wished that all the more when he at length saw the people clamber up the gangway—a miserable procession of half-drowned folk, some of them scarcely able to walk. No; his friends were not there. He returned to the hotel, and to his books.

But the attentions of Josephine and Véronique had become too pressing; so he retired from the reading-room, and took refuge in his own room upstairs. It fronted the sea. He could hear the long, monotonous, continuous wash of the waves; from time to time the windows rattled with the wind.

He took from his portmanteau another volume from that he had been reading, and sat down by the window. But he had only read a line or two when he turned and looked absently out on the sea. Was he trying to recall, amid all that confused and murmuring noise, some other sound that seemed to haunt him?—

> *"Who is your lady of love, O ye that pass*
> *Singing?"*

Was he trying to recall that pathetic thrill in his friend Evelyn's voice which he knew was but the echo of another voice? He had never heard Natalie Lind read; but he knew that that was how she had read,

when Evelyn's sensitive nature had heard and been permeated by the strange tremor. And now, as he opened the book again, whose voice was it he seemed to hear, in the silence of the small room, amid the low and constant murmur of the waves?

"—And ye shall die before your thrones be won.
—Yea, and the changed world and the liberal sun
Shall move and shine without us, and we lie
Dead; but if she too move on earth and live,
But if the old world with all the old irons rent
Laugh and give thanks, shall we be not content?
Nay, we shall rather live, we shall not die,
Life being so little and death so good to give.

* * * * * *

"—But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourselves with the cold future air;
When mother and father and tender sister and brother
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust, and no fruit of loving life shall be.
—She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother."

He turned again to the window, to the driven yellow sea, and the gusts of rain. Surely there was no voice to be heard from other and farther shores?

"—Is this worth life, is this, to win for wages?
Lo, the dead mouths of the awful grey-grown ages,
The venerable, in the past that is their prison,
In the outer darkness, in the unopening grave,
Laugh, knowing how many as ye now say have said,
How many, and all are fallen, are fallen and dead:
Shall ye dead rise, and these dead have not risen?
—Not we but she, who is tender and swift to save.

"—Are ye not weary and faint not by the way,
Seeing night by night devoured of day by day,

Seeing hour by hour consumed in sleepless fire?
Sleepless: and ye too, when shall ye too sleep?
—We are weary in heart and head, in hands and feet,
And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,
Than all things save the inexorable desire
Which whoso knoweth shall neither faint nor weep."

He rose, and walked up and down for a time. What would one not give for a faith like that?

"*—Is this so sweet that one were fain to follow?*
Is this so sure where all men's hopes are hollow,
Even this your dream, that by much tribulation
Ye shall make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight?
—Nay, though our life were blind, our death were fruitless,
Not therefore were the whole world's high hope rootless;
But man to man, nation would turn to nation,
And the old life live, and the old great world be great."

With such a faith—with that "inexorable desire" burning in the heart and the brain—surely one could find the answer easy enough to the last question of the poor creatures who wonder at the way-worn pilgrims—

"*—Pass on then and pass by us and let us be,*
For what light think ye after life to see?
And if the world fare better will ye know?
And if man triumph who shall seek you and say?"

That he could answer for himself, at any rate. He was not one to put much store by the fair soft present; and if he were to enter upon any undertaking such as that he had had but a glimpse of, neither personal reward nor the hope of any immediate success would be the lure. He would be satisfied to know that his labour or his life had been well spent. But

whence was to come that belief? whence the torch to kindle the sacred fire?

The more he read, during these days of waiting, of the books and pamphlets he had brought with him, the less clear seemed the way before him. He was struck with admiration when he read of those who had forfeited life or liberty in this or the other cause; and too often with despair when he came to analyze their aims. Once or twice, indeed, he was so moved by the passionate eloquence of some socialist writer that he was ready to say, "Well, the poor devils have toiled long enough; give them their turn, let the revolution cost what it may!" And then immediately afterwards: "What? Stir up the unhappy wretches to throw themselves on the bayonets of the standing armies of Europe? There is no emancipation for them that way."

But when he turned from the declamation and the impracticable designs of this impassioned literature to the vast scheme of co-operation that had been suggested rather than described to him, there seemed more hope. If all these various forces that were at work could be directed into one channel, what might they not accomplish? Weed out the visionary, the impracticable, the anarchical from their aims; and then what might not be done by this convergence of all these eager social movements? Lind, he argued with himself, was not at all a man likely to devote himself to optimistic dreams. Further than that—and here he was answering a suspicion that again and again recurred to him—what if, in such a great social movement, men were to be found who were only playing for their own hand? That was the case in every such combination. But false or self-seeking agents

neither destroyed the nobleness of the work nor could defeat it in the end if it were worthy to live. They might try to make for themselves what use they could of the current; but they too were swept onwards to the sea.

So he argued, and communed, and doubted, and tried to believe. And all through it—whether he paced up and down by the sea in the blustering weather; or strolled away through the town and up the face of the tall white cliff; or lay awake in the dark night, listening to the rush and moan of the waves—all through these doubts and questionings there was another and sweeter and clearer sound that seemed to come from afar—

> *"She shall be yet who is more than all these were,*
> *Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother."*

However loud the sea was at night, that was the sound he heard, clear and sweet: the sound of a girl's voice, that had joy in it, and faith in the future, and that spoke to him of what was to be.

Well, the days passed; and still his friends did not come. He had many trips across, to while away the time; and had become great friends with the stout, black-haired French captain. He had conveyed Josephine and Véronique and their little grandmother safely over, and had made them as comfortable as was possible under trying circumstances. And always and every day there were freshly cut flowers and renewed fruit, and a re-engaged saloon-carriage waiting for those strangers who did not come; until both hotel people and railway people began to think Mr. Brand as mad as the little French lady assured herself

he was, when he said he meant to cross the Channel twice for nothing.

At last—at last! He had strolled up to the Calais station, and was standing on the platform when the train came in. But there was no need for him to glance eagerly up and down at the now opening doors; for who was this calmly regarding him—or rather regarding him with a smile of surprise? Despite the big furred cloak and the hood, he knew at once; he darted forward, lifted the lower latch, and opened the door, and gave her his hand.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Brand?" said she, with a pleasant look of welcome. "Who could have expected to meet you here?"

He was confused, embarrassed, bewildered. This voice so strangely recalled those sounds that had been haunting him for days. He could only stammer out—

"I—I happened to be at Dover, and thought I would run over here for a little bit. How lucky you are—it is such a beautiful day for crossing."

"That is good news; I must tell papa," said Natalie, cheerfully, as she turned again to the open door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

"AND you are going over too? And to London also? Oh, that will be very nice."

It seemed so strange to hear this voice, that had for days sounded to him as if it were far away, now quite close, and talking in this friendly and familiar fashion. Then she had brought the first of the Spring

with her. The air had grown quite mild; the day was clear and shining; even the little harbour there seemed bright and picturesque in the sun. He had never before considered Calais a very beautiful place.

And as for her; well, she appeared pleased to have met with this unexpected companion; and she was very cheerful and talkative as they went down to the quay, these two together. And whether it was that she was glad to be relieved from the cramped position of the carriage, or whether it was that his being taller than she gave countenance to her height, or whether it was merely that she rejoiced in the sweet air and the exhilaration of the sunlight, she seemed to walk with even more than her usual proudness of gait. This circumstance did not escape the eye of her father, who was immediately behind.

"Natalie," said he, peevishly, "you are walking as if you wore a sword by your side."

She did not seem sorely hurt.

"'Du Schwert an meiner Linken!'" she said, with a laugh. "It is my military cloak that makes you think so, papa."

Why, even this cockle-shell of a steamer looked quite inviting on so pleasant a morning. And there before them stretched the blue expanse of the sea, with every wave, and every ripple on every wave, flashing a line of silver in the sunlight. No sooner were they out of the yellow-green waters of the harbour than Mr. Brand had his companions conducted on to the bridge between the paddle-boxes; and the little crop-haired French boy brought them camp-stools, and their faces were turned towards England.

"Ah!" said Natalie, "many a poor wretch has

breathed more freely when at last he found himself looking out for the English shore. Do you remember old Anton Pepczinski and his solemn toast, papa?"

She turned to George Brand.

"He was an old Polish gentleman who used to come to our house in the evening, he and a few others of his countrymen, to smoke and play chess. But always, sometime during the evening, he would say, 'Gentlemen, a Pole is never ungrateful. I call on you to drink this toast: *To the white chalk line beyond the sea!*'" And then she added, quickly, "If I were English, how proud I should be of England!"

"But why?" he said.

"Because she has kept liberty alive in Europe," said the girl, proudly. "Because she offers an exile to the oppressed, no matter from whence they come; because she says to the tyrant, 'No, you cannot follow.' Why, when even your beer-men, your draymen, know how to treat a Haynau, what must the spirit of the country be? If only those fine fellows could have caught Windischgrätz too!"

Her father laughed at her vehemence; Brand did not. That strange vibration in the girl's voice penetrated him to the heart.

"But then," said he, after a second or two, "I have been amusing myself for some days back by reading a good deal of political writing, mostly by foreigners; and if I were to believe what they say, I should take it that England was the most superstitious, corrupt, enslaved nation on the face of the earth. What with its reverence for rank, its worship of the priesthood—oh, I cannot tell you what a frightful country it is!"

"Who were the writers?" Mr. Lind asked.

Brand named two or three, and instantly the attention of the other seemed arrested.

"Oh, that is the sort of literature you have been reading?" he said, with a quick glance.

"I have had some days' idleness."

"Excuse me," said the other, with a smile; "but I think you might have spent it better. That kind of literature only leads to disorder and anarchy. It may have been useful at one time; it is useful no longer. Enough of ploughing has been done; we want sowing done now—we want writers who will build up instead of pulling down. Those Nihilists," he added, almost with a sigh, "are becoming more and more impracticable. They aim at scarcely anything beyond destruction."

Here Natalie changed the conversation. This was too bright and beautiful a day to permit of despondency.

"I suppose you love the sea, Mr. Brand?" she said. "All Englishmen do. And yachting—I suppose you go yachting?"

"I have tried it; but it is too tedious for me," said Brand. "The sort of yachting I like is in a vessel of five thousand tons, going three hundred and eighty miles a day. With half a gale of wind in your teeth in the 'rolling Forties,' then there is some fun."

"I must go over to the States very soon," Mr. Lind said.

"Papa!"

"The worst of it is," her father said, without heeding that exclamation of protest, "that I have so much to do that can only be done by word of mouth."

"I wish I could take the message for you," Brand

said, lightly. "When the weather looks decent, I very often take a run across to New York, put up for a few days at the Brevoort House, and take the next ship home. It is very enjoyable, especially if you know the officers. Then the bagman—I have acquired a positive love for the bagman."

"The what?" said Natalie.

"The bagman. The 'commy' his friends call him. The commercial traveller, don't you know? He is a most capital fellow!—full of life and fun, desperately facetious, delighting in practical jokes: altogether a wonderful creature. You begin to think you are in another generation—before England became melancholy—the generation, for example, that roared over the adventures of Tom and Jerry."

Natalie did not know who Tom and Jerry were; but that was of little consequence; for at this moment they began to descry "the white chalk line beyond the sea"—the white line of the English coast. And they went on chatting cheerfully; and the sunlight flashed its diamonds on the blue waters around them; and the white chalk cliffs became more distinct.

"And yet it seems so heartless for one to be going back to idleness," Natalie Lind said, absently. "Papa works as hard in England as anywhere else; but what can I do? To think of one going back to peaceful days, and comfort, and pleasant friends, when others have to go through such misery and to fight against such persecution. When Marie Herzen offered me her hand——"

She stopped abruptly, with a quick, frightened look, first at George Brand, then at her father.

"You need not hesitate, Natalie," her father said

calmly. "Mr. Brand has given me his word of honour he will reveal nothing he may hear from us."

"I do not think you need be afraid," said Brand; but all the same he was conscious of a keen pang of mortification. He, too, had noticed that quick look of fright and distrust. What did it mean, then? *"You are beside us, you are near to us; but you are not of us, you are not with us."*

He was silent, and she was silent too. She seemed ashamed of her indiscretion, and would say nothing further about Marie Herzen.

"Don't imagine, Mr. Brand," said her father, to break this awkward silence, "that what Natalie says is true. She is not going to be so idle as all that. No; she has plenty of hard work before her—at least, I think it hard work—translating from the German into Russian."

"I wish I could help," Brand said, in a low voice. "I do not know a word of Russian."

"You help?" she said, regarding him with the beautiful dark eyes, that had a sudden wonder in them. "Would you, if you knew Russian?"

He met that straight, fearless glance without flinching; and he said "Yes," while they still looked at each other. Then her eyes fell; and perhaps there was the slightest flush of embarrassment, or pleasure, on the pale, handsome face.

But how quickly her spirits rose! There was no more talk of politics as they neared England. He described the successive ships to her; he called her attention to the strings of wild-duck flying up Channel; he named the various headlands to her. Then, as they got nearer and nearer, the little Anneli had to be

sought out, and the various travelling impedimenta got together. It did not occur to Mr. Lind or his daughter as strange that George Brand should be travelling without any luggage whatever.

But surely it must have occurred to them as remarkable that a bachelor should have had a saloon-carriage reserved for himself—unless, indeed, they reflected that a rich Englishman was capable of any whimsical extravagance. Then, no sooner had Miss Lind entered this carriage, than it seemed as though everything she could think of was being brought for her. Such flowers did not grow in railway-stations—especially in the month of March? Had the fruit dropped from the telegraph-poles? Cakes, wine, tea, magazines, and newspapers appeared to come without being asked for.

"Mr. Brand," said Natalie, "you must be an English Monte Cristo: do you clap your hands, and the things appear?"

But a Monte Cristo should never explain. The conjuror who reveals his mechanism is no longer a conjuror. George Brand only laughed, and said he hoped Miss Lind would always find people ready to welcome her when she reached English shores.

As they rattled along through those shining valleys —the woods and fields and homesteads all glowing in the afternoon sun—she had put aside her travelling cloak and hood, for the air was quite mild. Was it the drawing off of the hood, or the stir of wind on board the steamer, that had somewhat disarranged her hair?—at all events, here and there about her small ear or the shapely neck there was an escaped curl of raven-black. She had taken off her gloves, too: her

hands, somewhat large, were of a beautiful shape, and transparently white. The magazines and newspapers received not much attention—except from Mr. Lind, who said that at last he should see some news neither a week old nor fictitious. As for these other two, they seemed to find a wonderful lot to talk about, and all of a profoundly interesting character. With a sudden shock of disappointment George Brand found that they were almost into London.

His hand-bag was at once passed by the customs-house people; and he had nothing to do but say good-bye. His face was not over cheerful.

"Well, it was a lucky meeting," Mr. Lind said. "Natalie ought to thank you for being so kind to her."

"Yes; but not here," said the girl, and she turned to him. "Mr. Brand, people who have travelled so far together should not part so quickly. It is miserable. Will you not come and spend the evening with us?"

"Natalie will give us something in the way of an early dinner," said Mr. Lind, "and then you can make her play the zither for you."

Well, there was not much hesitation about his accepting. That drawing-room, with its rose and green shaded candles, was not as other drawing-rooms in the evening. In that room you could hear the fountains plashing in the Villa Reale; and the Capri fishermen singing afar; and the cattle-bells chiming on the Campagna; and the gondolas sending their soft chorus across the lagoon. When Brand left his bag in the cloak-room at the station, he gave the porter half a crown for carrying it thither; which was surely unnecessary. Nor was there any hopeless apathy on his face as he drove away with these two friends through

the darkening afternoon, in the little hired brougham. When they arrived in Curzon Street, he was even good enough to assist the timid little Anneli to descend from the box; but this was in order that he might slip a tip into the hand of the coachman. The coachman scarcely said "Thank you." It was not until afterwards that he discovered he had put half a sovereign into his breeches-pocket as if it were an ordinary sixpence.

Natalie Lind came down to dinner in a dress of black velvet, with a mob-cap of rose-red silk. Round her neck she wore a band of Venetian silver-work, from the centre of which was suspended the little old-fashioned locket she had received in Hyde Park. George Brand remembered the story; and perhaps was a trifle surprised that she should wear so conspicuously the gift of a stranger.

She was very friendly, and very cheerful. She did not seem at all fatigued with her travelling; on the contrary, it was probably the sea-air and the sunlight that had lent to her cheek a faint flush of colour. But at the end of dinner her father said—

"Natalushka, if we go into the drawing-room, and listen to music, after so long a day, we shall all go to sleep. You must come into the smoking-room with us."

"Very well, papa."

"But, Miss Lind," the other gentleman remonstrated, "a velvet dress—tobacco-smoke——"

"My dresses must take their chance," said Miss Lind. "I wear them to please my friends, not to please chance acquaintances who may call during the day."

And so they retired to the little den at the end of the passage; and Natalie handed Mr. Brand a box of cigars to choose from, and got down from the rack her

father's long-stemmed, red-bowled pipe. Then she took a seat in the corner, by the fire; and listened.

The talk was all about that anarchical literature that Brand had been devouring down at Dover; and he was surprised to find how little sympathy Lind had with writing of that kind, though he had to confess that certain of the writers were personal friends of his own. Natalie sat silent, listening intently, and staring into the fire.

At last Brand said—

"Of course, I had other books. For example, one I see on your shelves there." He rose, and took down a green-covered volume. "Miss Lind," he said, "I am afraid you will laugh at me; but I have been haunted with the notion that you have been teaching Lord Evelyn how to read poetry, or that he has been unconsciously imitating you. I heard him repeat some passages from 'The Pilgrims,' and I was convinced he was reproducing something he had heard from you, Well—I am almost ashamed to ask you——"

A touch of embarrassment appeared on the girl's face; and she glanced at her father.

"Yes, certainly, Natalie: why not?"

"Well," she said, lightly, "I cannot read if I am stared at. You must remain as you are."

She took the book from him, and passed to the other side of the room; so that she was behind them both. There was silence for an instant or two as she turned over the leaves.

Then the silence was broken; and if Brand was instantly assured that his surmise was correct, he also knew that here was a more pathetic cadence—a prouder ring—than any that Lord Evelyn had thrown into the

lines. She read at random—a passage here, a passage there—but always it seemed to him that the voice was the voice of a herald proclaiming the new awakening of the world—the evil terrors of the night departing—the sunrise of liberty and right and justice beginning to shine over the sea. And these appeals to England!—

"O thou, clothed round with raiment of white waves,
Thy brave brows lightening through the grey wet air,
Thou, lulled with sea-sounds of a thousand caves,
And lit with sea-shine to thine inland lair,
Whose freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves
And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare,
O, by the centuries of thy glorious graves,
By the live light of the earth that was thy care,
Live, thou must not be dead,
Live; let thy armëd head
Lift itself up to sunward and the fair
Daylight of time and man,
Thine head republican,
With the same splendour on thine helmless hair
That in his eyes kept up a light
Who on thy glory gazed away their sacred sight."

The cry there was in this voice! Surely his heart answered.

"O Milton's land, what ails thee to be dead!"

Was it in this very room, he wondered, that the old Polish refugee was used to lift up his trembling hand and bid his compatriots drink to "the white chalk line beyond the sea"? How could he forget, as he and she had sat together that morning and gazed across the blue waters to the far and sunlit line of coast, the light that shone on her face as she said, "If I were English, how proud I should be of England!" And this England of her veneration and her love—did it

not contain some, at least, who would answer to her appeal?

Presently Natalie Lind shut the book, and gently laid it down, and stole out of the room. She was gone only for a few seconds. When she returned, she had in her hand a volume of sketches, of which she had been speaking during dinner.

He did not open this volume at once. On the contrary, he was silent for a little while; and then he looked up, and addressed Natalie, with a strange grave smile on his face.

"I was about to tell your father, Miss Lind, when you came in, that if I could not translate for you, or carry a message across the Atlantic for him, he might at least find something else that I can do. At all events, may I say that I am willing to join you, if I can be of any help at all?"

Ferdinand Lind regarded him for a second, and said quite calmly—

"It is unnecessary. You have already joined us."

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT IN VENICE.

THE solitary occupant of this railway-carriage was apparently reading; but all the same he looked oftener at his watch than at his book. At length he definitely shut the volume, and placed it in his travelling-bag. Then he let down the carriage-window, and looked out into the night.

The heavens were clear and calm; the newly risen moon was but a thin crescent of silver; in the south a

large planet was shining. All around him, as it seemed, stretched a vast plain of water, as dark and silent and serene as the overarching sky. Then, far ahead, he could catch a glimpse of a pale line stretching across the watery plain—a curve of the many-arched viaduct along which the train was thundering; and beyond that again, and low down at the horizon, two or three minute and dusky points of orange. These lights were the lights of Venice.

This traveller was not much hampered with luggage. When finally the train was driven into the glare of the station, and the usual roar and confusion began, he took his small bag in his hand and rapidly made his way through the crowd. Then out and down the broad stone steps; and into a gondola. In a couple of minutes he was completely away from all that glare and bustle and noise; nothing around him but darkness and an absolute silence.

The city seemed as the City of the Dead. The tall and sombre buildings on each side of the water-highway were masses of black—blackest of all where they showed against the stars. The ear sought in vain for any sound of human life; there was nothing but the lapping of the water along the side of the boat, and the slow, monotonous plash of the oar.

Further and further into the silence and the darkness; and now here and there a window, close down to the water, and heavily barred with rectangular bars of iron, shows a dull red light; but there is no sound, nor any passing shadow within. The man who is standing by the hearse-like cabin of the gondola observes and thinks. These black buildings; the narrow and secret canals; the stillness of the night: are they

not suggestive enough—of revenge, a quick blow, and the silence of the grave? And now, as the gondola still glides on, there is heard a slow and distant tolling of bells. The deed is done, then?—no longer will the piteous hands be thrust out of the barred window—no longer will the wild cry for help startle the passer-by in the night-time. And now again, as the gondola goes on its way, another sound—still more muffled and indistinct—the sound of a church organ, with the solemn chanting of voices. Are they praying for the soul of the dead? The sound becomes more and more distant; the gondola goes on its way.

The new-comer has no further time for these idle fancies. At the Rialto bridge he stops the gondola, pays the man, and goes ashore. Then, rapidly ascending the steps, he crosses the bridge, descends the other side, and again jumps into a gondola. All this the work of a few seconds.

But it was obvious he had been expected. He gave no instructions to the two men in this second gondola. They instantly went to work, and with a rapid and powerful stroke sent the boat along—with an occasional warning cry as they swept by the entrance to one or other of the smaller canals. Finally they abruptly left the Grand Canal, close by the Corte d'Appello, and shot into a narrow opening that seemed little more than a slit between the buildings.

Here they had to go more cautiously; the orange light of their lamp shining as they passed on the empty archways, and on the iron-barred windows, and the slimy steps. And always this strange silence in the dead or sleeping city, and the monotonous plash of the oars, and the deep low cry of "Sia premi!" or

"Sia stali!" to give warning of their approach. But, indeed, that warning was unnecessary; they were absolutely alone in this labyrinth of gloomy water-ways.

At length they shot beneath a low bridge, and stopped at some steps immediately beyond. Here one of the men, getting out, proceeded to act as guide to the stranger. They had not far to go. They passed first of all into a long, low, and foul-smelling archway, in the middle of which was a narrow aperture protected by an iron gate. The man lit a candle, opened the gate, and preceded his companion along a passage and up a stone staircase. The atmosphere of the place was damp and sickly; the staircase was not more than three feet in width; the feeble glimmer of the candle did but little to dispel the darkness. Even that was withdrawn; for the guide, having knocked thrice at a door, blew out the candle, and retreated downstairs.

"*The night is dark, Brother.*"

"*The dawn is near.*"

Instantly the door was thrown open; the dark figure of a man was seen against the light; he said, "Come in! come in!" and his hand was outstretched. The stranger seemed greatly surprised.

"What, you, Calabressa!" he exclaimed. "Your time has not expired!"

"What, no? My faith, I have made it expire!" said the other, airily, and introducing a rather badly pronounced French word or two into his Italian. "But come in—come in! Take a seat: you are early; you may have to wait."

He was an odd-looking person, this tall, thin, elderly man, with the flowing yellow-white hair and the albino eyes. There was a semi-military look about his braided

coat; but on the other hand he wore the cap of a German student — of purple velvet, with a narrow leather peak. He seemed to be proud of his appearance. He had a gay manner.

"Yes, I am escaped. Ah, how fine it is! You walk about all day, as you please; you smoke cigarettes; you have your coffee; you go to look at the young English ladies who come to feed the pigeons in the Place."

He raised two fingers to his lips; and blew a kiss to all the world.

"Such complexions! A wild rose in every cheek! But listen, now: this is not about an English young lady. I go up to the Church of St. Mark—beside the bronze horses. I am enjoying the air when I hear a sound; I turn; over there I see open windows; ah! the figure in the white dressing-gown! It is the *diva* herself. They play the *Barbiere* to-night; and she is practising as she dusts her room. *Una voce poco fà*— it trills all through the square. She puts the ornaments on the mantelpiece straight. *Lo giurai, la vincerò!*— she goes to the mirror and makes the most beautiful attitude. Ah, what a spectacle—the black hair all down—the white dressing-gown—*Io sono docile"*—and again he kissed his two fingers. Then he said—

"But now, you. You do not look one day older. And how is Natalie?"

"Natalie is well, I believe," said the other, gravely.

"You are a strange man. You have not a soft heart for the pretty creatures of the world; you are implacable. The little Natalushka, then: how is she?"

"The little Natalushka is grown big, now; she is quite a woman."

"A woman! She will marry an Englishman, and become very rich: is not that so?"

"Natalie—I mean, Natalushka will not marry," said the other, coldly. "She knows she is very useful to me. She knows I have no other."

"*Maintenant:* the business—how goes that?"

"Elsewhere, well; in England, not quite so well," said Ferdinand Lind. "But what can you expect? The English think they have no need of co-operation, except to get their groceries cheap. Why, everything is done in the open air there. If a scoundrel gets a lash too many in prison, you have it before Parliament next week. If a schoolboy is kicked by his master, you have all the newspapers in the country ablaze. The newspapers govern England. A penny journal has more power than the Commander-in-chief."

"Then why do you remain in England?"

"It is the safest for me, personally. Then there is most to be done there. Again, it is the headquarters of money. Do you see, Calabressa? One must have money, or one cannot work."

The albino-looking man lit a cigarette.

"You despair, then, of England? No, you never despair."

"There is a prospect. The southern Englishman is apathetic; he is interested only, as I said, in getting his tea and sugar cheap. But the northern Englishman is vigorous. The trades' associations in the north are vast, powerful, wealthy, but they are suspicious of anything foreign. Members join us; the associations will not. But what do you think of this, Calabressa; if one were to have the assistance of an Englishman whose father was one of the great ironmasters; whose

name is well-known in the north; who has a large fortune, and a strong will?"

"You have got such a man?"

"Not yet. He is only a Friend. But if I do not misjudge him, he will be a Companion soon. He is a man after my own heart: once with us, all the powers of the earth will not turn him back."

"And his fortune?"

"He will help us with that also, no doubt."

"But how did it occur to Providence to furnish you with an assistant so admirably equipped?"

"Do you mean how did I chance to find him? Through a young English lord—an amiable youth, who is a great friend of Natalie's—of Natalushka's. Why, he has joined us, too——"

"An English milord!"

"Yes; but it is merely from poetical sympathy. He is pleasant, and warm-hearted; but to us not valuable. And he is poor."

At this moment a bell rang, apparently in an adjoining apartment. Calabressa jumped from his chair, and hastened to a door on his left, which he opened. A *portière* prevented anything being seen in the chamber beyond.

"Has the summons been answered?" a voice asked, from the other side.

"Yes, sir," said Calabressa. "Brother Lind is here."

"That is well."

The door was again shut; and Calabressa resumed his seat.

"Brother Lind," said he, in a low voice, though he leaned back in his chair, and still preserved that

gay manner, "I suppose you do not know why you have been summoned?"

"Not I."

"*Bien.* But suppose one were to guess? Suppose there is a gentleman somewhere about who has been carrying his outraging of one's common notions of decency just a little too far? Suppose it is necessary to make an example? You may be noble, and have great wealth, and honour, and smiles from beautiful women; but if some night you find a little bit of steel getting into your heart, or if some morning you find your coffee as you drink it burn all the way down until you can feel it burn no more—what then? You must bid good-bye to your mistresses, and to your gold plate and feasts, and your fountains spouting perfumes, and all your titles: is not that so?"

"But who is it?" said Lind, suddenly bending forward.

The other regarded him for a moment, playfully.

"What if I were to mention the '*Starving Cardinal*'?"

"Zaccatelli!" exclaimed Lind, with a ghastly pallor appearing for a moment in the powerful iron-grey face.

Calabressa only laughed.

"Oh yes, it is beautiful to have all these fine things. And the unhappy devils who are forced to pawn their last sticks of furniture at the Monte di Pietà, rather than have their children starve when bread is dear: how it must gratify them to think of his Eminence seizing the funds of that flourishing institution to buy up the whole of the grain in the Papal States! What an admirable speculation! How kind to the poor, on the part of the friend and colleague of the Vicar of Christ! What?—do you think because I am a Cardinal

I am not to make a profit in corn? I tell you those people have no business to be miserable; they have no business to go and pawn their things; if I am allowed to speculate with the funds, why not? *Allons donc!*—it is a devilish fine world, merry gentlemen!"

"But—but why have they summoned me?" Lind said, in the same low voice.

"Who knows?" said the other, lightly. "I do not. Come, tell me more about the little Natalushka. Ah, do I not remember the little minx, when she came in after dinner among all those men, with her '*Eljen a haza!*' What has she grown to? what has she become?"

"Natalie is a good girl," said her father; but he was thinking of other things.

"Beautiful?"

"Some would say so."

"But not like the English young ladies?"

"Not at all."

"I thought not. I remember the black-eyed little one—with her pride in Batthyany, and her hatred of Görgey, and all the rest of it. The little Empress!—with her proud eyes, and her black eyelashes. Do you remember at Dunkirk, when old Anton Pepcinski met her for the first time? '*Little Natalushka, if I wait for you, will you marry me when you grow up?*' Then the quick answer, '*I am not to be called any longer by my nursery name; but if you will fight for my country, I will marry you when I grow up.*'"

Light-hearted as this man Calabressa was, having escaped from prison, and eagerly inclined for chatter, after so long a spell of enforced silence, he could not fail to perceive that his companion was hardly listening to him.

"Mais, mon frère, à quoi bon le regarder?" he said, peevishly. "If it must come, it will come. Or is it the poor Cardinal you pity? That was a good name they invented for him, any way—*il cardinale affamatore.*"

Again the bell rang, and Ferdinand Lind started. When he turned to the door, it was with a look on his face of some anxiety and apprehension—a look but rarely seen there. Then the *portière* was drawn aside to let some one come through: at the same moment Lind caught a brief glimpse of a number of men sitting round a small table.

The person who now appeared, and whom Lind saluted with great respect, was a little, sallow-complexioned man, with an intensely black beard and moustache, and a worn expression of face. He returned Lind's salutation gravely, and said—

"Brother, the Council thank you for your prompt answer to the summons. Meanwhile, nothing is decided. You will attend here to-morrow night."

"At what hour, Brother Granaglia?"

"Ten. You will now be conveyed back to the Rialto steps; from thence you can get to your hotel."

Lind bowed acquiescence; and the stranger passed again through the *portière* and disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

VACILLATION.

"EVELYN, I distrust that man Lind."

The speaker was George Brand, who kept impatiently pacing up and down those rooms of his, while

his friend, with a dreamy look on the pale and fine face, lay back in an easy-chair, and gazed out of the clear panes before him. It was night; the blinds had not been drawn; and the row of windows, framed by their scarlet curtains, seemed a series of dark-blue pictures, all throbbing with points of golden fire.

"Is there any one you do not distrust?" said Lord Evelyn, absently.

"I hope so. But with regard to Lind: I had distinctly to let him know that he must not assume that I am mixed up in any of his schemes until I definitely say so. When, in answer to my vague proposal, he told me I had already pledged myself, I confess I was startled for a moment. Of course it was all very well for him afterwards to speak of my declared sympathy, and of my promise to reveal nothing, as being quite enough, at least for the earlier stage. If that is so, you may easily acquire adherents. But either I join with a definite pledge, or not at all."

"I am inclined to think you had better not join," said Lord Evelyn, calmly.

After that there was silence; and Brand's companion lay and looked on the picture outside, that was so dark, and solemn, and still. In the midst of all that blaze of various and trembling lights, was the unseen river—unseen but for the myriad reflections that showed the ripples of the water, then the far-reaching rows of golden stars, spanning the bridges, and marking out the long Embankment sweep beyond St. Thomas's Hospital. On the other side black masses of houses—all their commonplace detail lost in the mysterious shadow; and over them the silver crescent of the moon, just strong enough to give an edge of white to a tall shot-tower.

Then far away in the east, in the clear dark sky, the dim grey ghost of a dome; scarcely visible, and yet revealing its presence; the great dome of St. Paul's.

This beautiful, still scene — the silence was so intense that the footfall of a cab-horse crossing Waterloo Bridge could be faintly heard, as the eye followed the light slowly moving between the two rows of golden stars — seemed to possess but little interest for the owner of these rooms. For the moment he had lost altogether his habitual air of proud reserve.

"Evelyn," he said abruptly, "was it not in these very rooms you insisted that, if the work was good, one need not be too scrupulous about one's associates?"

"I believe so," said the other, indifferently: he had almost lost hope of ever overcoming his friend's inveterate suspicion.

"Well," Brand said, "there is something in that. I believe in the work that Lind is engaged in, if I am doubtful about him. And if it pleases you or him to say that I have joined you merely because I express sympathy, and promise to say nothing, well and good. But you: you are more than that?"

The question somewhat startled Lord Evelyn; and his pale face flushed a little.

"Oh yes," he said; "of course. I—I cannot precisely explain to you."

"I understand. But, if I did really join, I should at least have you for a companion."

Lord Evelyn turned and regarded him.

"If you were to join, it might be that you and I should never see each other again in this world. Have I not told you? Your first pledge is that of

absolute obedience; you have no longer a right to your own life; you become a slave, that others may be free."

"And you would have me place myself in the power of a man like Lind!" Brand exclaimed.

"If it were necessary," said Lord Evelyn, "I should hold myself absolutely at the bidding of Lind; for I am convinced he is an honest man, as he is a man of great ability and unconquerable energy and will. But you would no more put yourself in Lind's power than in mine. Lind is a servant, like the rest of us. It is true he has in some ways a sort of quasi-independent position, which I don't quite understand; but as regards the Society that I have joined, and that you would join, he is a servant, as you would be a servant. But what is the use of talking? Your temperament isn't fitted for this kind of work."

"I want to see my way clear," Brand said, almost to himself.

"Ah, that is just it. Whereas, you must go blindfold."

Thereafter again silence. The moon had risen higher now; and the paths in the Embankment gardens just below them had grown grey in the clearer light. Lord Evelyn lay and watched the light of a hansom that was rattling along, by the side of the river.

"Do you remember," said Brand, with a smile, "your repeating some verses here one night; and my suspecting you had borrowed the inspiration somewhere? My boy, I have found you out. What I guessed was true. I made bold to ask Miss Lind to read, that evening I came up with them from Dover."

"I know it," said Lord Evelyn, quietly.

"You have seen her, then?" was the quick question.

"No; she wrote to me."

"Oh, she writes to you?" the other said.

"Well, you see, I did not know her father had gone abroad; and I called. As a rule, she sees no one while her father is away; on the other hand, she will not say she is not at home if she is at home. So she wrote me a note of apology for refusing to see me; and in it she told me you had been very kind to them, and how she had tried to read, and had read very badly, because she feared your criticism——"

"I never heard anything like it!" Brand said; and then he corrected himself. "Well, yes, I have; I have heard you, Evelyn. You have been an admirable pupil."

"Now when I think of it," said his friend, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, "this letter is mostly about you, Brand. Let me see if there is anything in it you may not see. No; it is all very nice and friendly."

He was about to hand over the letter, when he stopped.

"I do believe," he said, looking at Brand, "that you are capable of thinking Natalie wrote this letter on purpose you should see it."

"Then you do me a great injustice," Brand said, without anger. "And you do her a great injustice. I do not think it needs any profound judge of character to see what that girl is."

"For that is one thing I could never forgive you, Brand."

"What?"

"If you were to suspect Natalie Lind."

This was no private and confidential communication that passed into Brand's hand, but a frank, gossipping, sisterly note, stretching out beyond its initial purpose. And there was no doubt at all that it was mostly about Brand himself; and the reader grew red as he went on. He had been so kind to them at Dover; and so interested in her papa's work; and so anxious to be of service and in sympathy with them. And then she spoke as if he were definitely pledged to them; and how proud she was to have another added to the list of her friends. George Brand's face was as red as his beard when he folded up the letter. He did not immediately return it.

"What a wonderful woman that is!" said he, after a time. "I did not think it would be left for a foreigner to teach me to believe in England."

Lord Evelyn looked up.

"Oh," Brand said, instantly, "I know what you would ask. What is my belief worth? 'How much do I sympathize?' Well, I can give you a plain answer: a shilling in the pound income-tax. If England is this stronghold of the liberties of Europe —if it is her business to be the lamp-bearer of freedom—if she must keep her shores inviolate as the refuge of those who are oppressed and persecuted, well, then, I would pay a shilling income-tax, or double that, or treble that, to give her a navy that would sweep the seas. For a big army there is neither population, nor sustenance, nor room; but I would give her such a navy as would let her put the world to defiance."

"I wish Natalie would teach you to believe in a few other things, while she is about it," said his friend, with a slight and rather sad smile.

"For example?"

"In human nature, a little bit, for example. In the possibility of a woman being something else than a drawing-room peacock, or worse. Do you think she could make you believe that it is possible for a woman to be noble-minded, unselfish, truth-speaking, modest, and loyal-hearted?"

"I presume you are describing Natalie Lind herself."

"Oh," said his friend, with a quick surprise, "then you admit there may be an exception, after all? You do not condemn the whole race of them now, as being incapable of even understanding what frank dealing is, or honour, or justice, or anything beyond their own vain and selfish caprices?"

George Brand went to the window.

"Perhaps," said he, "my experience of women has been unfortunate, unusual. I have not had much chance, especially of late years, of studying them in their quiet domestic spheres. But otherwise I suppose my experience is not unusual. Every man begins his life, in his salad days, by believing the world to be a very fine thing, and women particularly to be very wonderful creatures—angels, in short, of goodness, and mercy, and truth, and all the rest of it. Then, judging by what I have seen and heard, I should say that about nineteen men out of twenty get a regular facer —just at the most sensitive period of their life; and then they suddenly believe that women are devils, and the world a delusion. It is bad logic; but they are not in a mood for reason. By-and-by the process of

recovery begins; with some short, with others long. But the spring-time of belief, and hope, and rejoicing —I doubt whether that ever comes back."

He spoke without any bitterness. If the facts of the world were so, they had to be accepted.

"I swallowed my dose of experience a good many years ago," he continued, "but I haven't got it out of my blood yet. However, I will admit to you the possibility of there being a few women like Natalie Lind."

"Well, this is better, at all events!" Lord Evelyn said, cheerfully.

"Beauty, of course, is a dazzling and dangerous thing," Brand said; "for a man always wants to believe that fine eyes and a sweet voice have a sweet soul behind them. And very often he finds behind them something in the shape of a soul that a dog or a cat would be ashamed to own. But as for Natalie Lind, I don't think one can be deceived. She shows too much. She vibrates too quickly—too inadvertently—to little chance touches. I did suspect her, I will confess. I thought she was hired to play the part of decoy. But I had not seen her for ten minutes before I was convinced she was playing no part at all."

"But goodness gracious, Brand, what are we coming to?" Lord Evelyn said, with a laugh. "What? We already believe in England, and patriotism, and the love of freedom? And we are prepared to admit that there is one woman—positively, in the world, one woman—who is not a cheat and a selfish coquette? Why, where are we to end?"

"I don't think I said only one woman," Brand replied, quite good-naturedly; and then he added, with a smile, "You ask where we are to end. Suppose I

were to accept your new religion, Evelyn? Would that please you? And would it please her, too?"

"Ah," said his companion, looking up with a quick glance of pleasure. But he would argue no more.

"Perhaps I have been too suspicious. It is a habit; I have had to look after myself pretty much through the world; and I don't overvalue the honesty of people I don't know. But when I once set my hand to the work, I am not likely to draw back."

"You could be of so much more value to them than I can," said Lord Evelyn, wistfully. "I don't suppose you spend more than half of your income."

"Oh, as to that," said Brand, at once, "that is a very different matter. If they like to take myself and what I can do, well and good; money is a very different thing."

His companion raised himself in his chair; and there was surprise on his face.

"How can you help them so well as with your money?" he cried. "Why, it is the very thing they want most."

"Oh, indeed," said Brand, coldly. "You see, Evelyn, my father was a business man; and I may have inherited a commercial way of looking at things. If I were to give away a lot of money, to unknown people, for unknown purposes, I should say that I was being duped, and that they were putting the money in their own pocket."

"My dear fellow!" Lord Evelyn protested. "The need of money is most urgent. There are printing-presses to be kept going; agents to be paid; police-spies to be bribed—there is an enormous work to be done, and money must be spent."

"All the same," said Brand, who was invariably most resolved when he was most quiet in his manner, "I shall prefer not running the chance of being duped in that direction. Besides, I am bound in honour not to do anything of the kind. I can fling myself away —that is my own look-out; and my life, or the way I spend it, is not of great consequence to me. But my father's property, if anything happens to me, ought to go intact to my sister's boys, to whom, indeed, I have left it by will. I will say to Lind, 'Is it myself or my money that is wanted: you must choose.'"

"The question would be an insult."

"Oh, do you think so? Very well; I will not ask it. But that is the understanding." Then he added, more lightly, "Why, would you have the Pilgrim start with his pocket full of sovereigns? His staff and his wallet are all he is entitled to. And when one is going to make a big plunge, shouldn't one strip?"

There was no answer; for Lord Evelyn's quick ear had caught the sound of wheels in the adjacent street.

"There is my trap," he said, looking at his watch as he rose.

Waters brought the young man his coat, and then went out to light him downstairs.

"Good night, Brand. Glad to see you are getting into a wholesomer frame of mind. I shall tell Natalie you are now prepared to admit that there is in the world at least one woman who is not a cheat."

"I hope you will not utter a word to Miss Lind of any of the nonsense we have been talking," said Brand, hastily, and with his face grown red.

"All right. By the way, when are you coming up to see the girls?"

"To-morrow afternoon: will that do?"

"Very well; I shall wait in."

"Let me see if I remember the order aright," said Brand, holding up his fingers and counting. "Rosalys, Blanche, Ermentrude, Agnes, Jane, Frances, Geraldine: correct?"

"Quite. I think their mother must forget at times. Well, good night."

"Good night—good night!"

Brand returned to the empty room, and threw wide open one of the windows. The air was singularly mild for a night in March; but he had been careful of his friend. Then he dropped into an easy-chair, and opened a letter.

It was the letter from Natalie Lind, which he had held in his hand ever since, eagerly hoping that Evelyn would forget it—as, in fact, he had done. And now with what a strange interest he read and re-read it; and weighed all its phrases; and tried to picture her as she wrote these lines; and studied even the peculiarities of the handwriting. There was a quaint foreign look here and there—the capital B; for example, was written in German fashion; and that letter occurred a good many times. It was Mr. Brand, and Mr. Brand, over and over again—in this friendly and frank gossip, which had all the brightness of a chat over a new acquaintance who interests one. He turned to the signature. "*Your friend, Natalie.*"

Then he walked up and down, slowly and thoughtfully; but ever and again he would turn to the letter to see that he had quite accurately remembered what she had said about the delight of the sail from Calais, and the beautiful flowers at Dover, and her gladness

at the prospect of their having this new associate and friend. Then the handwriting again. The second stroke of the N in her name had a little notch at the top—German fashion. It looked a pretty name, as she wrote it.

Then he went to the window, and leaned on the brass bar, and looked out on the dark and sleeping world, with its countless golden points of fire. He remained there a long time, thinking: of the past, in which he had fancied his life was buried; of the present, with its bewildering uncertainties; of the future, with its fascinating dreams. There might be a future for him, then, after all; and hope; and the joy of companionship? Surely that letter meant at least so much.

But then the boundlessness, the eager impatience, of human wishes! Further and further, as he leaned and looked out, without seeing much of the wonderful spectacle before him, went his thoughts and eager hopes and desires. Companionship: but with whom? And might not the spring-time of life come back again, as it was now coming back to the world in the sweet new air that had begun to blow from the south? And what message did the soft night-wind bring him but the name of Natalie? And Natalie was written in the clear and shining heavens, in letters of fire and joy; and the river spoke of Natalie; and the darkness murmured Natalie.

But his heart, whispering to him—there, in the silence of the night, in the time when dreams abound, and visions of what may be—his heart, whispering to him, said—"Natalushka!"

CHAPTER XI.

A COMMISSION.

When Ferdinand Lind looked out next day from the window of his hotel, it was not at all the Venice of chromo-lithography that lay before him. The morning was wild, grey, and gloomy, with a blustering wind blowing down from the north; the broad expanse of green water ruffled and lashed by continual squalls; the sea-gulls wheeling and dipping over the driven waves; the dingy masses of shipping huddled along the wet and deserted quays; the long spur of the Lido a thin black line between the green sea and the purple sky; and the domed churches over there, and the rows of tall and narrow and crumbling palaces overlooking the canals nearer at hand, all alike dismal and bedraggled and dark.

When he went outside he shivered; but at all events these cold damp odours of the sea and the rainy wind were more grateful than the mustiness of the hotel. But the deserted look of the place! The gondolas, with their hearse-like coverings on, lay empty and untended by the steps, as if waiting for a funeral procession. The men had taken shelter below the archways, where they formed groups, silent, uncomfortable, sulky. The few passers-by on the wet quays hurried along with their voluminous black cloaks wrapped round their shoulders, and hiding most of the mahogany-coloured faces. Even the plague of beggars had been dispersed; they had slunk away shivering into the foul-smelling nooks and crannies.

There was not a soul to give a handful of maize to the pigeons in the Place of St. Mark.

But when Lind had got round into the Place, what was his surprise to find Calabressa having his breakfast in the open air at a small table in front of a *café*. He was quite alone there; but he seemed much content. In fact, he was laughing heartily, all to himself, at something he had been reading in the newspaper open before him.

"Well," said Lind, when they had exchanged salutations, "this is a pleasant sort of morning for one to have one's breakfast outside."

"My faith," said Calabressa, "if you had taken as many breakfasts as I have shut up in a hole, you would be glad to get the chance of a mouthful of fresh air. Sit down, my friend."

Lind glanced round, and then sat down.

"My good friend Calabressa," he said presently, "for one connected as you are with certain persons, do you not think now that your costume is a little conspicuous? And then your sitting out here—in broad daylight——"

"My friend Lind," said he, with a laugh, "I am as safe here as if I were in Naples, which I believe to be the safest place in the world for one not in good odour with the authorities. And if there was a risk, would I not run it to hear my little nightingale over there, when she opens the casements? Ah! she is the most charming Rosina in the world."

"Yes, yes," said Lind. "I am not speaking of you. But—the others. The police must guess you are not here for nothing."

"Oh, the others? Rest assured. The police might

as well try to put their finger on a globule of quicksilver. It is but three days since they left the Piazza del Popolo, Torre del Greco. To-morrow, if their business is finished to-night, they will vanish again; and I shall be dismissed"

"If their business is finished?" repeated Lind, absently. "Yes; but I should like to know why they have summoned me all the way from England. They cannot mean——"

"My dear friend Lind," said Calabressa, "you must not look so grave. Nothing that is going to happen is worth one's troubling one'sself about. It is the present moment that is of consequence; and at the present moment I have a joke for you. You know Armfeldt, who is now at Berne: they had tried him only four times in Berlin; and there was only a little matter of nine years' sentence against him. Listen."

He took up the *Osservatore*, and read out a paragraph, stating that Dr. Julius Armfeldt had again been tried *in contumaciam*, and sentenced to a further term of two years' imprisonment, for seditious writing. Further, the publisher of his latest pamphlet, a citizen of Berne, had likewise been sentenced in his absence to twelve months' imprisonment.

"Do they think Armfeldt will live to be a centenarian, that they keep heaping up those sentences against him? Or is it as another inducement for him to go back to his native country and give himself up? It is a great joke, this childish proceeding; but a Government should not declare itself impotent. It is like the Austrians when they hanged you and the others in effigy. Now I remember, the little Natalushka was grieved that she was not born then; for she wished to

see the spectacle, and to have killed the people who insulted her father."

"I am afraid it is no joke at all," Lind said, gloomily. "Those Swiss people are craven. What can you expect from a nation of hotel-waiters? They cringe before every bully in Europe; you will find that, if Bismarck insists, the Federal Council will expel Armfeldt from Switzerland directly. No; the only safe refuge now-a-days for the reformers, the protestants, the pioneers of Europe, is England; and the English do not know it. They do not think of it. They are so accustomed to freedom that they believe that is the only possible condition, and that other nations must necessarily enjoy it. When you talk to them of tyranny, of political persecution, they laugh. They cannot understand such a thing existing. They fancy it ceased when Bomba's dungeons were opened."

"For my part," said Calabressa, lighting a cigarette, and calling for a small glass of cognac, "I am content with Naples."

"And the protection of pickpockets."

"My friend," said the other, coolly, "if you refer to the most honourable the association of the Camorristi I would advise you not to speak too loud."

Calabressa rose, having settled his score with the waiter.

"Allons!" said he. "What are you going to do to-day?"

"I don't know," said Lind, discontentedly. "May the devil fly away with this town of Venice: I never come here but it is either freezing or suffocating."

"You are in an evil humour to-day, friend Lind; you have caught the English spleen. Come, I have a little business to do over at Murano; the breeze will

do you good. And I will tell you the story of my escape."

The time had to be passed somehow. Lind walked with his companion along to the steps, descended and jumped into a gondola, and presently they were shooting out into the turbulent green water that the wind drove against the side of the boat in a succession of sharp shocks. Seated in the little funereal compartment, they could talk without much fear of being heard by either of the men; and Calabressa began his tale. It was not romantic. It was simply a case of bribery; the money to effect which had certainly not come out of Calabressa's shallow pockets. In the midst of the story—or, at least, before the end of it—Lind said, in a low voice—

"Calabressa, have you any sure grounds for what you said about Zaccatelli?"

His companion glanced quickly outside.

"It is you are now indiscreet," he said, in an equally low voice. "But yes; I think that is the business. However," he added, in a gayer tone, "what matter? To-day is not to-morrow; to-morrow will shift for itself." And therewith he continued his story, though his listener seemed singularly preoccupied and thoughtful.

They arrived at the island; got out; and walked into the courtyard of one of the smaller glass-works. There were one or two of the workmen passing; and here something occurred that seemed to arrest Lind's attention.

"What, here also?" said he, in a low voice.

"Every one; the master included. It is with him I have to do this little piece of business. Now you

will be so good as to wait for a short time, will you not?—and it is warm in there; I will be with you soon."

Lind walked into the large workshop, where there were a number of people at work, all round the large, circular, covered caldron, the various apertures into which sent out fierce rays of light and heat. He walked about, seemingly at his ease; looking at the apprentices experimenting; chatting to the workmen. And at last he asked one of these to make for him a little vase in opalescent glass, that he could take to his daughter in England; and could he put the letter N on it somewhere? It was at least some occupation watching the quick and dexterous handling under which the little vase grew into form, and had its decoration cleverly pinched out, and its tiny bits of colour added. The letter N was not very successful; but then Natalie would know that her father had been thinking of her at Venice.

This excursion at all events tided over the forenoon; and when the two companions returned to the wet and disconsolate city, Calabressa was easily persuaded to join his friend in some sort of mid-day meal. After that, the long-haired albino-looking person took his leave, having arranged how Lind was to keep the assignation for that evening.

The afternoon cleared up somewhat; but Ferdinand Lind seemed to find it dull enough. He went out for an aimless stroll through some of the narrow back streets, slowly making his way amongst the crowd that poured along these various ways. Then he returned to his hotel, and wrote some letters. Then he dined early; but still the time did not seem to pass. He resolved on getting through an hour or so at the theatre.

A gondola swiftly took him away through the labyrinth of small and gloomy canals, until at length the wan orange glare shining out into the night showed him that he was drawing near one of the entrances to the Fenice. If he had been less preoccupied—less eager to think of nothing but how to get the slow hours over—he might have noticed the strangeness of the scene before him: the successive gondolas stealing silently up through the gloom to the palely lit stone steps; the black coffins appearing to open; and then figures in white and scarlet opera-cloaks getting out into the dim light to ascend into the brilliant glare of the theatre staircase. He, too, followed, and got into the place assigned to him. But this spectacular display failed to interest him. He turned to the bill to remind him what he had to see. The blaze of colour on the stage—the various combinations of movement—the resounding music—all seemed part of a dream; and it annoyed him somehow. He rose and left.

The intervening time he spent chiefly in a *café* close by the theatre, where he smoked cigarettes and appeared to read the newspapers. Then he wandered away to the spot appointed for him to meet a particular gondola, and arrived there half an hour too soon. But the gondola was there also. He jumped in, and was carried away through the silence of the night.

When he arrived at the door, which was opened to him by Calabressa, he had contrived to throw off, by a strong effort of will, any appearance of anxiety. He entered and sat down, saying only—

"Well? What news?"

Calabressa laughed slightly; and went to a cupboard, and brought forth a bottle and two small glasses.

"If you were Zaccatelli," he said, "I would say to you, 'My Lord,' or 'Your Excellency,' or whatever they call those flamingoes with the bullet heads, 'I would advise you to take a little drop of this very excellent cognac, for you are about to hear something, and you will need steady nerves.' Meanwhile, Brother Lind, it is not forbidden to you and me to have a glass. The Council provide excellent liquor."

"Thank you, I have no need of it," said Lind, coldly. "What do you mean about Zaccatelli?"

"This," said the other, filling himself out a glass of the brandy, and then proceeding to prepare a cigarette. "If the moral sense of the country, too long outraged, should determine to punish the Starving Cardinal, I believe he will get a good year's notice to prepare for his doom. You perceive? What harm does sudden death to a man? It is nothing. A moment of pain; and you have all the happiness of sleep, indifference, forgetfulness. That is no punishment at all: do you perceive?"

Calabressa continued airily—

"People are proud when they say they do not fear death. The fools! What has any one to fear in death? To the poor it means no more hunger, no more imprisonment, no more cold and sickness, no more watching of your children when they are suffering and you cannot help; to the rich it means no more triumph of rivals and envy and jealousy, no more sleepless nights and ennui of days, no more gout, and gravel, and the despair of growing old. Death! It is the great emancipation. And people talk of the punishment of death!"

He gave a long whistle of contempt.

"But," said he, with a smile, "it is a little bit

different if you have to look forward to your death on a certain fixed day. Then you begin to overvalue things—a single hour of life becomes something."

He added, in a tone of affected condolence—

"Then one wouldn't wish to cause any poor creature to say his last adieux without some preparation. And in the case of a cardinal, is a year too little for repentance? Oh, he will put it to excellent use."

"Very well, very well," said Ferdinand Lind, with an impatient frown gathering over the shaggy eyebrows. "But I want to know what I have to do with all this."

"Brother Lind," said the other, mildly, "if the Secretary Granaglia, knowing that I am a friend of yours, is so kind as to give me some hints of what is under discussion, I listen, but I ask no questions. And you—I presume you are here not to protest, but to obey."

"Understand me, Calabressa: it was only to you as a friend that I spoke," said Lind, gravely. And then he added, "The Council will not find, at all events, that I am recusant."

A few minutes afterwards the bell rang; and Calabressa jumped to his feet; while Lind, in spite of himself, started. Presently the *portière* was drawn aside, and the little sallow-complexioned man whom he had seen on the previous evening, entered the room. On this occasion, however, Calabressa was motioned to withdraw, and immediately did so. Lind and the stranger were left together.

"I need scarcely inform you, Brother Lind," said he, in a slow and matter-of-fact way, "that I am the authorized spokesman of the Council."

As he said this, for a moment he rested his hand

on the table. There was on the forefinger a large ring, with a red stone in it, engraved. Lind bowed acquiescence.

"Calabressa has no doubt informed you of the matter before the Council. That is now decided; the decree has been signed. Zaccatelli dies within a year from this day. The motives which have led to this decision may hereafter be explained to you, even if they have not already occurred to you; they are motives of policy, as regards ourselves and the progress of our work, as well as of justice."

Ferdinand Lind listened, without response.

"It has further been decided that the blow be struck from England."

"England!" was the involuntary exclamation.

"Yes," said the other, calmly. "To give full effect to such a warning it must be clear to the world that it has nothing to do with any private revenge or low intrigue. Assassination has been too frequent in Italy of late. The doubting throughout the world must be convinced that we have agents everywhere; and that we are no mere local society for the revenging of private wrongs."

Lind again bowed assent.

"Further," said the other, regarding him, "the Council charge you with the execution of the decree."

Lind had almost expected this; he did not flinch.

"After twelve months' grace granted, you will be prepared with a sure and competent agent who will give effect to the decree of the Council; failing such an one, the duty will devolve on your own shoulders."

"On mine!" he was forced to exclaim. "Surely——"

"Do you forget," said the other, calmly, "that six-

teen years ago your life was forfeited, and given back to you by the Council?"

"So I understood," said Lind. "But it was not my life that was given me, then?—only the lease of it till the Council should claim it again? However!"

He drew himself up; and the powerful face was full of decision.

"It is well," said he. "I do not complain. If I exact obedience from others, I, too, obey. The Council shall be served."

"Further instructions shall be given you. Meanwhile, the Council once more thank you for your attendance. Farewell, Brother!"

"Farewell, Brother!"

When he had gone, and the bell again rung, Calabressa reappeared. Lind was too proud a man to betray any concern.

"It is as you told me, Calabressa," said he, carelessly, as his friend proceeded to light him down the narrow staircase. "And I am charged with the execution of their vengeance. Well; I wish I had been present at their deliberations, that is all. This deed may answer so far as the continental countries are concerned; but, so far as England is concerned, it will undo the work of years."

"What! England!" exclaimed Calabressa, lightly—"where they blow up a man's house with gunpowder, or dash vitriol in his face, if he works for a shilling a day less wages?—where they shoot landlords from behind hedges if the rent is raised?—where they murder policemen in the open street, to release political prisoners? No, no, friend Lind; I cannot believe that."

"However, that is not my business, Calabressa.

The Council shall be obeyed. I am glad to know you are again at liberty; when you come to England you will see how your little friend Natalie has grown."

"Give a kiss from me to the little Natalushka," said he, cheerfully; and then the two parted.

CHAPTER XII.

JACTA EST ALEA.

"NATALIE," said her father, entering the breakfast-room, "I have news for you to-day. This evening Mr. Brand is to be initiated."

The beautiful, calm face betrayed no surprise.

"That is always the way," she answered, almost absently. "One after the other, they go in; and I only am left out, alone."

"What," he said, patting her shoulder as he passed, "are you still dreaming of reviving the *Giardiniere?* Well, it was a pretty idea to call each sister in the lodge by the name of a flower. But now-a-days, and in England especially, if women intermeddled in such things, do you know what they would be called? *Pétroleuses!*"

"Names do not hurt," said the girl, proudly.

"No, no. Rest content, Natalie. You are initiated far enough. You know all that needs to be known; and you can work with us and associate with us like the rest. But about Brand: are you not pleased?"

"I am indeed pleased, papa."

"And I am more than pleased," said Lind, thoughtfully. "He will be the most important accession we have had for many a day. Ah, you women have sharp

eyes; but there are some things you cannot see—there are some men whose character you cannot read."

Natalie glanced up quickly; and her father noticed that surprised look.

"Well," said he, with a smile, "what now is your opinion of Mr. Brand?"

Instantly the soft eyes were cast down again, and a faint tinge of colour appeared in her face.

"Oh, my opinion, papa?" said she, as if to gain time to choose her words. "Well, I should call him manly, straightforward—and—and very kind—and—and very English——"

"I understand you perfectly, Natalie," her father said, with a laugh. "You and Lord Evelyn are quite in accord. Yes, and you are both thoroughly mistaken. You mean by his being so English that he is cold, critical, unsympathetic: is it not so? You resent his being cautious about joining us. You think he will be but a lukewarm associate—suspecting everything—fearful about going too far—a half-and-half ally. My dear Natalie, that is because neither Lord Evelyn nor you know anything at all about that man."

The faint colour in the girl's cheeks had deepened; and she remained silent, with her face downcast.

"The pliable ones," her father continued, "the people who are moved by fine talking, who are full of amiable sentiments, and who take to work like ours as an additional sentiment—you may initiate a thousand of them, and not gain an atom of strength. It is a hard head that I want, and a strong will; a man determined to have no illusions at the outset; a man who, once pledged, will not despair or give up, in the face of failure, difficulty, or disappointment, or any-

thing else. Brand is such a man. If I were to be disabled to-morrow, I would rather leave my work in his hands than in the hands of any man I have seen in this country."

Was it to hide the deepening colour in her face that the girl went round to her father, and stood rather behind him, and put her hand on his shoulder, and stooped down to his ear.

"Papa," said she, "I—I hope you don't think I have been saying anything against Mr. Brand. Oh no. How could I do that—when he has been so kind to us—and—and just now especially, when he is about to become one of us? You must forget what I said about his being English, papa; after all, it is not for us to say that being English is anything else than being kind and generous and hospitable. And I am exceedingly pleased that you have got another associate, and that we have got another good friend, in England."

"*Alors*, as Calabressa would say, you can show that you are pleased, Natalie," her father said, lightly, "by going and writing a pretty little note, asking your new friend Mr. Brand to dine with us to-night, after the initiation is over. And I will ask Evelyn if I see him."

But this proposal in nowise seemed to lessen the girl's embarrassment. She still clung about the back of her father's chair.

"I would rather not do that, papa," said she, after a second.

"Why? Why?" said he.

"Would it not look less formal for you to ask him, papa? You see, it is once or twice that we have

asked him to dine with us without giving him proper notice——"

"Oh, that is nothing—nothing at all. A bachelor with an evening disengaged is glad enough to fill it up anyhow. Well, if you would rather not write, Natalie, I will ask him myself."

"Thank you, papa," said she, apparently much relieved; and therewith she went back to her seat; and her father turned to his newspaper.

The day passed, and the evening came. As six o'clock was striking George Brand presented himself at the little door in Lisle Street, Soho, and was admitted. Lind had already assured him that, as far as England was concerned, no idle mummeries were associated with the ceremony of initiation; to which Brand had calmly replied, that if mummeries were considered necessary, he was as ready as any one to do his part of the business. Only he added that he thought the unknown powers had acted wisely—so far as England was concerned—in discarding such things.

When he entered the room his first glance round was reassuring. There were six persons present, besides Lind; and they did not at all suggest the typical Leicester Square foreigner. On the contrary, he guessed that four out of the six were either English or Irish; and two of them he recognized, though they were unknown to him personally. The one was a Home Rule M.P., ferocious enough in the House of Commons, but celebrated as the most brilliant, and amiable, and fascinating of diners-out; the other was an Oxford don, of large fortune and wildly Radical views, who wrote a good deal in the papers. There

was a murmur of conversation going on, which ceased as Lind briefly introduced the newcomer.

The ceremony, if ceremony it could be called, was simple enough. The candidate for admission was required to sign a printed document, solemnly pledging himself to devote his life and the labour of his hands and brain to the work of the association; to implicitly obey any command reaching him from the Council, or communicated through an officer of the first degree; and to preserve inviolable secrecy. Brand read this paper through twice; and signed it. It was then signed by the seven witnesses. He was further required to inscribe his signature in a large volume, which contained a list of members of a particular section. That done, the six strangers present shook him by the hand, and left.

He looked round, surprised. Had he been dreaming during these brief five minutes? Yet he could hear the noise of their going downstairs.

"Well," said Mr. Lind, with a smile. "It is not a very terrible ceremony, is it? Did you expect prostrations at the altar; and blindfold gropings, and the blessing of the dagger? When you come to know a little more of our organization, of its extent and its power, you will understand how we can afford to dispense with all those theatrical ways of frightening people into obedience and secrecy."

"I expected to find Evelyn here," said George Brand. He was in truth, just a little bit bewildered as yet. He had been assured that there would be no foolish mummeries or fantastic rites of initiation; but all the same he had been much occupied with this step he was about to take; he had been thinking of it much;

he had been looking forward to something unknown; and he had been nerving himself to encounter whatever might come before him. But that five minutes of silence; the quick reading and signing of a paper; the sudden dispersion of the small assemblage: he could scarcely believe it was all real.

"No," Lind said, "Lord Evelyn is not yet an officer. He is only a Companion in the third degree, like yourself."

"A what?"

"A Companion in the third degree. Surely you read the document that you signed?"

It was still lying on the table before him. He took it up; yes, he certainly was so designated there. Yet he could not remember seeing the phrase, though he had before signing read every word twice over.

"And now, Mr. Brand," his companion said, seating himself at the other side of the table, "when you have got over your surprise that there should be no ceremony, it will become my duty to give you some idea—some rough idea—of the mechanism and aims of our association, and to show you in what measure we are allied with other societies. The details you will become acquainted with by-and-by; that will be a labour of time. And you know, of course, or you have guessed, that there are no mysteries to be revealed to you, no profound religious truths to be communicated, no dogmas to be accepted. I am afraid we are very degenerate descendants of the Mystics and the Illuminati and all the rest of them; we have become prosaic; our wants are sadly material. And yet we have our dreams and aspirations too; and the virtues that we exact—obedience, temperance, faith, self-

sacrifice—are not ignoble. Meanwhile, to begin. I think you may prepare yourself to be astonished."

But astonishment was no word for the emotion experienced by the newly admitted member when Ferdinand Lind proceeded to give him, with careful facts and sober computations, some rough outline of the extent and power of this intricate and far-reaching organization. Hitherto the word "International" had with him been associated with the ridiculous fiasco at Geneva; but here was something, not calling itself international, which aimed at nothing less than knitting together the multitudes of the nations, not only in Europe but in the English and French and German speaking territories beyond the seas, in a solemn league—a league for self-protection and mutual understanding, for the preservation of international peace, the spread of knowledge, the outbraving of tyranny, the defiance of religious intolerance, the relief of the oppressed, the help of the poor and the sick and the weak. This was no cut-throat conspiracy or wild scheme of confiscation and plunder; but a design for the establishment of wide and beneficent law, a law which should protect, not the ambition of kings, not the pride of armies, not the revenues of priests, but the rights and the liberties of those who were "darkening in labour and pain." And this message that could go forth alike to the Camorristi and the Nihilists; to the Free Masons and the Good Templars; to the Trades-unionists and the Knights of Labour—to all those masses of men moved by the spirit of co-operation —"See, Brothers, what we have to show you. Some of you are aiming at chaos and perdition; others putting wages as their god and sovereign; others content with

a vague philanthropy almost barren of results. This is all the help we want of you—to pledge yourselves to associate with us, to accept our modest programme of actual needs, to give help to those who are in want or trouble, to promise that you will stand by us in the time to come. And when the time does come; when we are combined; when knowledge is abroad, and mutual trust; who will say 'Yes' if the voice of the people in every nation murmurs 'No'? What priest will reimpose the Inquisition on us; what king drive us to shed blood that his robes may have the richer dye; what policeman in high places endeavour to stamp out our God-given right of free speech? It is so little for you to grant; it is so much, for you and for us, to gain!"

These were not the words he uttered; for Lind spoke English slowly and carefully; but they were the spirit of his words. And as he went on describing to this new member what had already been done, what was being done, and the great possibilities of the future, Brand began to wonder whether all this gigantic scheme, with its simple, bold, and practical outlines, were the work of this one man. He ventured by-and-by to hint at some such question.

"Mine?" Lind said, frankly. "Ah, no. Not the inspiration of it. I am only the mechanic putting brick and brick together; the design is not mine, nor that of any one man. It is an aggregate project—a speculation occupying many a long hour of imprisonment—a scheme to be handed from one to the other, with alterations and suggestions."

"But even your share of it—how can one man control so much?" Brand said; for he easily perceived

what a mass of detail had to pass through this man's hands.

"I will tell you," said the other. "Because every stone added to the building is placed there for good. There is no looking back. There are no pacifications of revolt. No questions; but absolute obedience. You see, we exact so little: why should any one rebel? However, you will learn more and more, as you go on; and soon your work will be appointed you. Meanwhile, I thank you, Brother."

Lind rose, and shook his hand.

"Now," said he, "that is enough of business. It occurred to me this morning that, if you had nothing else to do this evening, you might come and dine with us, and give Natalie the chance of meeting you in your new character."

"I shall be most pleased," said Brand—and his face flushed.

"I telegraphed to Evelyn. If he is in town, perhaps he will join us. Shall we walk home?"

"If you like."

So they went out together, into the glare and clamour of the streets. George Brand's heart was very full, with various emotions; but, not to lose altogether his English character, he preserved a somewhat critical tone as he talked.

"Well, Mr. Lind," he said, "so far as I can see and hear, your scheme has been framed not only with great ability, but also with a studied moderation and wisdom. The only point I would urge is this—that, in England, as little as possible should be said about kings and priests. A great deal of what you said would scarcely be understood here. You see in Eng-

land it is not the Crown now-a-days which instigates or insists on war; it is Parliament and the people. Dynastic ambitions do not trouble us. There is no reason whatever why we here should hate kings, when they are harmless."

"You are right; the case is different," Lind admitted. "But that makes adhesion to our programme all the easier."

"I was only speaking of the policy of mentioning things which might alarm timid people. Then as for the priests; it may be the interest of the priests in Ireland to keep the peasantry ignorant; but it is certainly not so in England. The Church of England fosters education——"

"Are not your clergymen the bitterest enemies of the School Board schools?"

"Well, they may dislike seeing education dissociated from religion—that is natural, considering what they believe; but they are not necessary enemies of education. Perhaps I am a very young member to think of making such a suggestion. But the truth is, that when an ordinary Englishman hears anything said against kings and priests, he merely thinks of kings and priests as he knows them—and as being mostly harmless creatures now-a-days—and concludes that you are a Communist wanting to overturn society altogether."

"Precisely so. I told Natalie this morning that if she were to be allowed to join our association her English friends would imagine her to be a *pétroleuse*."

"Miss Lind is not in the association?" Brand said, quickly.

"As yet no women have been admitted. It is a difficulty. For in some societies with which we are

partly in alliance women are members. Ah, such noble creatures many of them are, too! However, the question may come forward by-and-by. In the mean time, Natalie, without being made aware of what we are actually doing—that, of course, is forbidden—knows something of what our work must be, and is warm in her sympathy. She is a good help, too: she is the quickest translator we have got."

"Do you think," Brand said, somewhat timidly, but with a frown on his face, "that it is fair to put such tedious labour on the shoulders of a young girl? Surely there are enough of men to do the work?"

"You shall propose that to her yourself," Lind said, laughing.

Well, they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and when they went upstairs to the drawing-room, they found Lord Evelyn there. Natalie Lind came forward —with less than usual of her graciously self-possessed manner—and shook hands with him briefly, and said with averted look—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Brand."

Now, as her eyes were cast down, it was impossible that she could have noticed the quick expression of disappointment that crossed his face. Was it that she herself was instantly conscious of the coldness of her greeting, and anxious to atone for that? Was it that she plucked up heart of grace? At all events, she suddenly offered him both her hands with a frank courage; she looked him in the face with the soft, tender, serious eyes; and then, before she turned away, the low voice said—

"Brother, I welcome you."

CHAPTER XIII.

SOUTHWARD.

AFTER a cold and gloomy spring, a glimpse of early summer shone over the land; and after a long period of anxious travail—in wet and dismal towns—in comfortless inns—with associates not always to his liking—George Brand was hurrying to the south. Ah, the thought of it, as the train whirled along on this sunlit morning! After the darkness, the light; after fighting, peace; after the hard task-work, a look, a smile of reward! No more than that was his hope; but it was a hope that had kept his heart glad on many a lonely night.

During all this time he had never even thought of dissociating Natalie Lind from the work in which he was now so earnestly engaged. He did not stay to estimate the value of a divided allegiance; nor was he troubled by any doubts as to the disinterestedness of his zeal. Sometimes, it is true, he was seized with a sense of personal gratitude to Lord Evelyn for having introduced him to this occupation, with its countless immediate activities, and its future that widened out into illimitable and ever-fascinating possibilities. But always his faith in the justice and usefulness of what he had undertaken went side by side with the hope that Natalie would approve. He would not have admitted that it was only for her sake that he had joined this association; but always, acknowledged or unacknowledged, there was this secret consciousness that she would be proud of the way in which he had answered her indirect appeal. As the train thundered

on through the awakening country, there seemed to him a sort of rhythmical roar in the noise. He was like a schoolboy released from school.

At length his companion, who had slept steadily on since ever they had entered the compartment at Carlisle at about one in the morning, awoke, rubbed his eyes, and glanced at the window.

"We are going to have a fine day at last, Humphreys," said Brand, cheerfully.

"They have been having better weather in the south, sir."

The man looked like a well-dressed mechanic. He had an intelligent face, keen and hard. He spoke with the Newcastle burr.

"I wish you would not call me 'sir,'" Brand said.

"It comes natural, somehow, sir," said the other, with great simplicity. "There is not a man in my part of the country but would say 'sir' to one of the Brands of Darlington. When Mr. Lind telegraphed to me you were coming down, I telegraphed back, 'Is he one of the Brands of Darlington;' and when I got his answer I said to myself, 'Here is the man to go to the Political Committee of the Trades' Union Congress: they won't fight shy of him.'"

"Well, we have no great cause to grumble at what has been done in that direction; but that wretched *Internationale* is doing a deal of mischief. There is not a trades-unionist in the country who does not know what is going on in France. A handful of irresponsible madmen trying to tack themselves on to the workmen's association—well, surely the men will have more sense than to listen. The *congrès ouvrier* to change its name, and to become the *congrès révolutionnaire!* When I

first went to Jackson, Molyneux, and the others, I found they had a sort of suspicion that we wanted to make Communists of them and tear society to pieces."

"You have done more in a couple of months, sir, than we all have done in the last ten years," his companion said.

"That is impossible. Look at——"

He named some names, certain of them well known enough.

The other shook his head.

"Where we have been they don't believe in London professors, and speech-makers, and chaps like that. They know that the north is the backbone and the brain of England, and in the north they want to be spoken to by a north-countryman."

"I am a Buckinghamshire man."

"That may be where you live, sir; but you are one of the Brands of Darlington," said the other, doggedly.

By-and-by they entered the huge, resounding station.

"What are you going to do to-night, Humphreys? Come and have some dinner with me, and we will look in afterwards at the Century."

Humphreys seemed embarrassed for a moment.

"I was thinking of going to the Coger's Hall, sir," said he, hitting upon an excuse. "I have heard some good speaking there."

"Mostly bunkum, isn't it?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Then I shall see you to-morrow morning in Lisle Street. Good-bye."

He jumped into a hansom, and was presently rattling away through the busy streets. How sweet and fresh was the air, even here in the midst of the misty and

golden city! The early summer was abroad; there was a flush of green on the trees in the squares. When he got down to the Embankment, he was quite surprised by the beauty of the gardens; there were not many gardens in the towns he had chiefly been living in.

He dashed up the narrow wooden stairs.

"Look alive now, Waters: get my bath ready."

"It is ready, sir."

"And breakfast."

"Whenever you please, sir."

He took off his dust-smothered travelling-coat, flung it on the couch, and then passed into his dressing-room.

After bath and breakfast there was an enormous pile of correspondence awaiting him; for not a single letter referring to his own affairs had been forwarded to him for over two months. He had thrown his entire time and care into his work in the north. And now that these arrears had to be cleared off, he attacked the business with an obvious impatience. Formerly he had been used to dawdle over his letters, getting through a good portion of the forenoon with them and conversations with Waters about Buckinghamshire news. Now, even with that omniscient factotum by his side, his progress was slow, simply because he was hurried. He made dives here and there, without system, without settlement. At last, looking at his watch, he jumped up: it was half-past eleven.

"Some other time, Waters; some other time; the man must wait," he said to the astonished but patient person beside him. "If Lord Evelyn calls, tell him I shall look in at the Century to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Some half-hour thereafter he was standing in Park Lane, his heart beating somewhat quickly, his eyes fixed eagerly on two figures that were crossing the thoroughfare lower down, to one of the gates leading into Hyde Park. These were Natalie Lind and the little Anneli. He had known that he would see her thus; he had imagined the scene a thousand times; he had pictured to himself every detail—the trees, the tall railings, the spring flowers in the plots, and the little rosy-cheeked German girl walking by her mistress's side; and yet now that this familiar thing had come true, he trembled to behold it; he breathed quickly; he could not go forward to her and hold out his hand. Slowly, for they were walking slowly, he went along to the gate and entered after them; cautiously, lest she should turn suddenly and confront him with her eyes; drawn, and yet fearing, to follow. She was talking with some animation to her companion; though even in this profound silence he could not hear the sound of her voice. But he could see the beautiful oval of her face; and sometimes, when she turned with a laugh to the little Anneli, he caught a glimpse of the black eyes and eyelashes, the smiling lips and brilliant teeth; and once or twice she put out the palm of her right hand with a little gesture which, despite her English dress, would have told a stranger that she was of foreign ways. But the look of welcome, the smile of reward that he had been looking forward to?

Well, Mr. Lind was in America; and during his absence his daughter saw but few visitors. There was no particular reason why, supposing that George Brand met Natalie in the street, he should not go up and shake hands with her; and many a time in these men-

tal pictures of his of her morning walk with the rosy-cheeked Anneli, he imagined himself confronting her under the shadow of the trees, and perhaps walking some way with her, to listen once more to the clear, low vibrations of her musical voice. But no sooner had he seen her come into Park Lane—the vision become real—than he felt he could not go up and speak to her. If he had met her by accident, perhaps he might; but to watch her, to entrap her, to break in on her wished-for isolation under false pretences—all that he suddenly felt to be impossible. He could follow her with his heart; but the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, the smile of the calm, beautiful, dark eyes, were as remote for him as if she, too, were beyond the broad Atlantic.

He was not much given to introspection and analysis; during the past two months more especially he had been far too busy to be perpetually asking "Why? why?"—the vice of indolence. It was enough that, in the cold and the wet, there was a fire in his heart that kept him glad with thinking of the fair days to come; and that, in the foggy afternoons or the lonely nights when he was alone, and perhaps despondent or impatient over the stupidity or contumacy he had had to encounter, there came to him the soft murmur of a voice from far away, proud, sad, and yet full of consolation and hope:

—But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourselves with the cold future air;
When mother and father and tender sister and brother,
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust, and no fruit of loving life shall be.

—She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother.

He could hear her voice; he could see the beautiful face grow pale with its proud fervour; he could feel the soft touch of her hand when she came forward and said, "Brother, I welcome you!"

And now that she was there before him, the gladness in his heart at the mere sight of her was troubled with a trembling fear and pain. She was but a stone's throw in front of him; but she seemed far away. The world was young around her; and she belonged to the time of youth and of hope; life, that he had been ready to give up as a useless and aimless thing, was only opening out before her, full of a thousand beauties and wonders and possibilities. If only he could have taken her hand, and looked into her eyes, and claimed that smile of welcome, he would have been nearer to her. Surely in one thing at least they were in sympathy. There was a bond between them. If the past had divided them, the future would bring them more together. Did not the Pilgrims go by in bands, until death struck down its victims here and there?

Natalie knew nothing of all this vague longing, and doubt, and pain in the breast of one who was so near her. She was in a gay mood. The morning was beautiful; the soft wind after the rain brought whiffs of scent from the distant rose-red hawthorn. Though she was here under shadow of the trees, the sun beyond shone on the fresh and moist grass; and at the end of the glades there were glimpses of brilliant colour in the foliage—the golden glow of the laburnum, the lilac blaze of the rhododendron bushes. And how still the

place was! Far off there was a dull roar of carriages in Piccadilly; but here there was nothing but the bleating of the sheep, the chirp of the young birds, the stir of the wind among the elms. Sometimes he could now catch the sound of her voice.

She was in a gay humour. When she got to the Serpentine—the north bank was her favourite promenade: she could see on the other side, just below the line of leaves, the people passing and repassing on horseback, but she was not of them—she found a number of small and ragged urchins wading. They had no boat; but they had the bung of a barrel which served; and that they were pushing through the water with twigs and sticks; their shapeless boots they had left on the bank. Now, as it seemed to Brand, who was watching from a distance, she planned a scheme. Anneli was seen to go ahead of the boys, and speak to them. Their attention being thus distracted, the young mistress stepped rapidly down to the tattered boots, and dropped something in each. Then she withdrew, and was rejoined by her maid; they walked away without waiting to see the result of their machinations. But George Brand, following by-and-by, heard one of the urchins call out with wonder that he had found a penny in his shoe; and this extraordinary piece of news brought back his comrades, who rather mechanically began to examine their foot-gear too. And then the amazement!—and the looks around!—and the examination of the pence, lest that treasure should vanish away! Brand went up to them.

"Look here, you young stupids—don't you see that tall lady away along there—by the boat-house—why don't you go and thank her?"

But they were either too shy or too incredulous; so he left them. He did not forget the incident.

Perhaps it was that the heavens had grown dark in the south-west, threatening a shower; but at all events Natalie soon turned and set out on her homeward way, giving this unknown spy some trouble to escape observation. But when she had passed, he again followed, now with even greater unrest at his heart. For would not she soon disappear; and the outer world grow empty; and the dull hours have to be faced? He had come to London with such hope and gladness; now the very sunlight was to be taken out of his life by the shutting of a door in Curzon Street.

Fate, however, was kinder to him than he had dared to hope. As Natalie was returning home, he ventured to draw a little nearer to her; but still with the greatest caution, for he would have been overcome with shame if she had detected him dogging her footsteps in this aimless if innocent manner. And now that she had got close to her own door, he had drawn nearer still—on the other side of the street; he so longed to catch one more glimpse of the dark eyes smiling and the mobile proud mouth. But just as the door was being opened from within, a man who had evidently been watching his chance thrust himself before the two women, barring their way, and proceeded to address Natalie in a vehement gesticulating fashion, with much clenching of his fists and throwing out of his arms. Anneli had shrunk back a step, for the man was uncouth and unkempt; but her young mistress stood erect and firm, confronting the beggar, or madman, or whoever he was, without the slightest sign of fear.

This was enough for George Brand. He was not

thrusting himself unfairly on her seclusion if he interposed to protect her from menace. Instantly he crossed the road.

"Who are you? What do you want?" This was what he said; but what he did was to drive the man back a couple of yards.

A hand was laid on his arm, quickly.

"He is in trouble," Natalie said, calmly. "He wants to see papa; he has come a long way; he does not understand that papa is in America. If you could only convince him—— But you do not talk Russian."

"I can talk English," said Brand, regarding the maniac-looking person before him with angry brows. "Will you go indoors, Miss Lind, and leave him to me. I will talk an English to him that he will understand."

"Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?" said she, with gentle reproof. "The man is in trouble. If I persuade him to go with you, will you take him to papa's chambers? Either Beratinsky or Heinrich Reitzei will be there."

"Reitzei is there."

"He will hear what this man has to say. Will you be so kind?"

"I will do anything to rid you of this fellow, who looks more like a madman than a beggar."

She stepped forward and spoke to the man again —her voice sounded gentle and persuasive to Brand, in this tongue which he could not understand. When she had finished, the uncouth person in the tattered garments dropped on both knees on the pavement, and took her hand in his, and kissed it in passionate gratitude. Then he rose, and stood with his cap in his hand.

"He will go with you. I am so sorry to trouble

you, Mr. Brand; and I have not even said, 'How do you do?'"

To hear this beautiful voice, after so long a silence; to find those calm, dark, friendly eyes regarding him—bewildered him, or gave him courage: he knew not which. He said to her, with a quick flush on his forehead—

"May I come back to tell you how I succeed?"

She only hesitated for a second.

"If you have time. If you care to take the trouble."

He carried away with him the look of her face—that filled his heart with sunlight. In the Hansom, into which he bundled his unkempt companion, if only he had known enough Russian, he would have expressed gratitude to him. Beggar or maniac, or whatever he was, had he not been the means of procuring for George Brand that long-coveted, long-dreamed-of smile of welcome?

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSSIAN EPISODE.

"Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?"—with that gentle protest still lingering in his ear, he was not inclined to be hard on this unfortunate wretch who was in the cab with him; and yet at the same time he was resolved to prevent any repetition of the scene he had just witnessed. And at last he discovered that the man had picked up in his wanderings a little German. His own German was not first-rate; it was fluent, forcible, and accurate enough so far as hotels and railway stations were concerned; elsewhere

it had a tendency to halt, blunder, and double back on itself. But, at all events, he managed to convey to his companion the distinct intimation that any further troubling of that young lady would only procure for him a broken head.

The dull, stupid, savage-looking face betrayed no sign of intelligence. He repeated the warning again and again; and at last, at the phrase "that young lady," the dazed, small eyes lit up somewhat; and the man clasped his hands.

"Ein Engel!" he said, apparently to himself. "Ein Engel—ein Engel! Ach Gott—wie schön—wie gemüthlich!"

"Yes, yes, yes," Brand said, "that is all very well; but one is not permitted to annoy angels—to trouble them in the street? Do you understand that that means punishment—one must be punished—if one returns to the house of that young lady? Do you understand?"

The man regarded him, with the small, deep-set eyes again sunk into apathy.

"Ihr Diener, Herr," said he, submissively.

"You understand you are not to go back to the house of the young lady?"

"Ihr Diener, Herr."

There was nothing to be got out of him, or into him; so Brand waited until he should get the help of Heinrich Reitzei, Lind's *locum tenens*.

Reitzei was in the chambers—at Lind's table, in fact. He was a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, slim and dark, with a perfectly pallid face, a small black moustache, carefully waxed, and an affectedly courteous smile. He wore a *pince-nez;* was fond of slang, to show his familiarity with English; and aimed

at an English manner, too. He seemed bored. He regarded this man whom Brand introduced to him without surprise, with indifference.

"Hear what this fellow has to say," Brand said, "will you? And give him distinctly to understand that if he tries again to see Miss Lind, I will break his head for him. What idiot could have given him Lind's private address?"

The man was standing near the door, stolid apparently, but with his small eyes keenly watching. Reitzei said a word or two to him. Instantly he went —he almost sprung—forward; and this movement was so unexpected that the equanimity of the pallid young man received a visible shock, and he hastily drew out a drawer a few inches. Brand caught sight of the handle of a revolver.

But the man was only eager to tell his story; and presently Reitzei had resumed his air of indifference. As he proceeded to translate for Brand's benefit—in interjectional phrases—what this man with the trembling hands and the burning eyes was saying, it was strange to mark the contrast between the two men.

"His name Kirski," the younger man was saying, as he eyed with a cool and critical air the wild look in the other's face. "A carver in wood, but cannot work now, for his hands tremble, through hunger and fatigue—through drink, I should say—native of small village in Kiev—had his share of the Communal land —but got permission from the Commune to spend part of the year in Kiev itself—sent back all his taxes duly, and money too, because—oh, this is it?—daughter of village Elder—young, beautiful, of course—left an orphan, with three brothers—and their share of the

land too much for them. Ah, this is the story, then, my friend? Married too—young, beautiful, good—yes, yes, we know all that——"

There were tears running down the face of the other man. But these he shook away; and a wilder light than ever came into his eyes.

"He goes to Kiev as usual—foolish fellow; now I see what all the row is about. When he returns three months after, he goes to his house. Empty. The neighbours will not speak. At last one says something about Pavel Michaieloff, the great proprietor, whose house and farm are some versts away—my good fellow, you have got the palsy—or is it drink?—he goes and seeks out the house of Pavel—yes, yes, the story is not new—Pavel is at the open window, smoking—he goes up to the window—there is a woman inside—when she sees him she utters a loud scream, and rushes for protection to the man Michaieloff—then all the fat is in the fire naturally——"

The Russian choked and gasped; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; he looked wildly round.

"Water?" said Reitzei. "Poor devil, you need some water to cool down your excitement. You are making as much fuss as if that kind of thing had never happened in the world before."

But he rose and got him some water, which the man drained eagerly; then he continued his story with the same fierce and angry vehemence.

"Well, yes, he had something to complain of, certainly," Reitzei said, translating all that incoherent passion into cool little phrases. "Not a fair fight. Pavel summons his men from the courtyard—men with whips—dogs too—he is lashed and driven along

the roads, and the dogs tear at him—oh yes, my good friend, you have been badly used; but you have come a long way to tell your story. I must ask him how the mischief he got here at all."

But here Reitzei paused and stared. Something the man said—in an eager, low voice, with his sunken small eyes all afire—startled him out of his critical air.

"Oh, that is it, is it?" he said, eyeing him. "He will do anything for us—he will commit a murder—ten murders—if only we give him money, a knife, and help to kill the man Michaieloff. Well, he is a lively sort of person to let loose on society."

"The man is clearly mad," Brand said.

"The man was madder who sent him to us," Reitzei answered. "I should not like to be in his shoes if Lind hears that this maniac was allowed to see his daughter."

The wretched creature standing there glanced eagerly from one to the other, with the eyes of a wild animal, seeking to gather something from their look; then he went forward to the table, and stooped down, and spoke to Reitzei still further, in the same low, fierce voice, his whole frame meanwhile shaking with his excitement. Reitzei said something to him in reply; and motioned him back. He retired a step or two; and then kept watching the faces of the two men.

"What are you going to do with him?" Brand said.

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

"I know what I should like to do with him if I dared," he said, with a graceful smile. "There is a friend of mine not a hundred miles away from that very Kiev who wants a little admonition. Her name is Petrovna; she is the gaol-matron of a female peni-

tentiary; she is just a little too fierce at times. Murderers, thieves, prostitutes: oh yes, she can be civil enough to them; but let a political prisoner come near her—one of her own sex, mind—and she becomes a devil, a tigress, a vampire. Ah, Madame Petrovna and I may have a little reckoning some day. I have asked Lind again and again to petition for a decree against her; but no, he will not move; he is becoming Anglicized, effeminate."

"A decree?" Brand said.

The other smiled, with an affectation of calm superiority.

"You will learn by-and-by. Meanwhile, if I dared, what I should like to do would be to give our friend here plenty of money, and not one but two knives; saying to him, 'My good friend, here is one knife for Michaieloff, if you like; but first of all here is this knife for that angel in disguise, Madame Petrovna, of the Female Penitentiary, in Novolevsk. Strike sure and hard!'"

For one instant his affectation forsook him; and there was a gleam in his eyes. This was but a momentary relapse from his professed indifference.

"Well, Mr. Brand, I suppose I must take over this madman from you. You may tell Miss Lind she need not be frightened."

"I should not think Miss Lind was in the habit of being frightened," said Brand, coldly.

"Ah, no; doubtless not. Well, I shall see that this fellow does not trouble her again. What fine tidings we had of your work in the north! You have been a power; you have moved mountains."

"I have moved John Molyneux," said Brand, with

a laugh. "And in these days that is a more difficult business."

"Fine news from Spain too," said Reitzei, glancing at some letters. "From Valladolid, Barcelona, Ferrol, Saragossa—all the same story: coalition, coalition. Salmero will be in London next week."

"But you have not told me what you are going to do with this man yet: you must stow the combustible piece of goods somewhere. Poor devil, his sufferings have made a pitiable object of him."

"My dear friend," said Reitzei, "you don't suppose that a Russian peasant would feel so deeply a beating with whips, or the worrying of dogs, or even the loss of his wife? Of course, coming all together, it was something of a hard grind. He must have been constitutionally insane; and that woke the whole thing up."

"Then he should be confined. He is a lunatic at large."

"I don't think he would harm anybody," Reitzei said, regarding the man as if he were a strange animal. "I would not shut up a dog in a lunatic asylum; I would rather put a bullet through his head. And this fellow—if we could humbug him a little, and get him to his work again—I know a man in Wardour Street who would do that for me—and see what effect the amassing of a little English money might have on him. Better a miser than a wild beast. And he seems a submissive sort of creature. Leave him to me, Mr. Brand."

Brand began to think a little better of Reitzei, whom hitherto he had rather disliked. He handed him five pounds, to get some clothes and tools for the man, who, when he was told of this generosity, turned to

Brand and said something to him in Russian, which set Reitzei laughing.

"What is it he says?"

"He said, 'Little Father, you are worthy to become the husband of the angel: may the day come soon!' I suppose the angel is Miss Lind: she must have been very kind to the man."

"She only spoke to him; but her voice can be kind," said Brand—rather absently; and then he left.

Away went the Hansom back to Curzon Street. He said to himself that it was not for nothing that this unfortunate wretch Kirski had wandered all the way from the Dnieper to the Thames. He would look after this man. He would do something for him. Five pounds only? And he had been the means of securing this interview—if only for three or four minutes; after the long period of labour and hope and waiting he might have gone without a word at all but for this over-troubled poor devil.

And now—now he might even see her alone, for a couple of minutes, in the hushed little drawing-room; and she might say if she had heard about what had been done in the north; and about his eagerness to return to the work. One look of thanks: that was enough. Sometimes, by himself up there in the solitary inns, the old fit had come over him; and he had laughed at himself; and wondered at this new fire of occupation and interest that was blazing through his life; and asked himself, as of old, to what end—to what end? But when he heard Natalie Lind's voice, there was a quick good-bye to all questioning. One look at the calm, earnest eyes; and he drank deep of faith, courage, devotion. And surely this story of the man

Kirski—what he could tell her of it—would be sufficient to fill up five minutes, eight minutes, ten minutes, while all the time he should be able to dwell on her eyes, whether they were downcast or turned to his with their frank, soft glance. He should be in the perfume of the small drawing-room. He would see the Roman necklace Mazzini had given her gleam on her bosom as she breathed.

He did not know what Natalie Lind had been about during his absence.

"Anneli, Anneli, hither, child!" she called in German. "Run up to Madame Potecki, and ask her to come and spend the afternoon with me. She must come at once; to lunch with me; I will wait."

"Yes, Fräulein. What music, Fräulein?"

"None; never mind any music. But she must come at once."

"Schön, Fräulein," said the little Anneli, about to depart.

Her young mistress called her back; and paused, with a little hesitation.

"You may tell Elizabeth," said she, with an indifferent air, "that it is possible—it is quite possible—it is at least possible—I may have two friends to lunch with me; and she must send at once if she wants anything more. And you could bring me back some fresh flowers, Anneli?"

"Why not, Fräulein?"

"Go quick, then, Anneli—fly like a young roe—*durch Wald und auf der Haide!*"

And so it came about that when George Brand was ushered into the scented little drawing-room—so anxious to make the most of the invaluable minutes—he found

himself introduced first of all to Madame Potecki, a voluble, energetic little Polish gentlewoman, whose husband had been killed in the Warsaw disturbances of '61, and who now supported herself in London by teaching music. She was eager to know all about the man Kirski; and hoped that he was not wholly a maniac; and trusted that Mr. Brand would see that her dear child—her adopted daughter, she might say—was not terrified again by the madman.

"My dear Madame," said Brand, "you must not imagine that it was from terror that Miss Lind handed over the man to me—it was from kindness. That is more natural to her than terror."

"Ah, I know the dear child has the courage of an army," said the little old lady, tapping her adopted daughter on the shoulder with the fan. "But she must take care of herself while her papa is away in America."

Natalie rose; and of course Brand rose also—with a sudden qualm of disappointment, for he took that as the signal of his dismissal; and he had scarcely spoken a word to her.

"Mr. Brand," said she, with some little trifle of embarrassment, "I know I must have deprived you of your luncheon. It was so kind of you to go at once with the poor man. Would it save you time—if you are not going anywhere—I thought perhaps you might come and have something with Madame and myself. You must be dying of hunger."

He did not refuse the invitation. And behold! when he went downstairs, the table was already laid for three: had he been expected, he asked himself? Those flowers there, too: he knew it was no maidservant's

fingers that had arranged and distributed them so skilfully.

How he blessed this little Polish lady; and her volubility; and her extravagant, subtle, honest flattery of her dear adopted daughter! It gave him liberty to steep himself in the rich consciousness of Natalie's presence; he could listen in silence for the sound of her voice—he could covertly watch the beauty of her shapely hands—without being considered preoccupied or morose. All he had to do was to say, "Yes, Madame," or "Indeed, Madame," the while he knew that Natalie Lind was breathing the same air with him, that at any moment the large, lustrous, dark eyes might look up and meet his. And she spoke little, too; and had scarcely her usual frank self-confidence: perhaps a chance reference of Madame Potecki to the fact that her adopted daughter had been brought up without a mother had somewhat saddened her.

The room was shaded in a measure; for the French silk blinds were down; but there was a soft golden glow prevailing all the same. For many a day George Brand remembered that little luncheon-party: the dull bronze glow of the room; the flowers; the soft, downcast eyes opposite him; the bright, pleasant garrulity of the little Polish lady; and always—ah, the delight of it!—that strange, trembling, sweet consciousness that Natalie Lind was listening as he listened, that almost he could have heard the beating of her heart.

And a hundred and a hundred times he swore that, whoever throughout the labouring and suffering world might regret that day, the man Kirski should not.

CHAPTER XV.

NEW FRIENDS.

It was a Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, in this pleasantly opening summer; and there was a fair show of "the quality" come out for their accustomed promenade, despite the few thunder-showers that had swept across from the south. These, in fact, had but served to lay the dust and to bring out the scent of the hawthorns and lilacs, so that the air was sweet with perfume; while the massive clouds, banking up in the north, formed a purple background to show up the young green foliage of the trees, all wet with rain, and shimmering tremulously in the sunlight.

George Brand and his friend Evelyn sat in the back row of chairs, watching the people pass and repass. It was a sombre procession but that here and there appeared a young English girl in her pale spring costume—paler than the fresh glow of youth and health on her face, and that here and there the sunlight, wandering down through the branches, touched a scarlet sun-shade—just then coming into fashion—until that shone like a beautiful spacious flower among the mass of green.

When they had been silently watching the people for some little time, Brand said, almost to himself—

"How very unlike those women she is!"

"Who? Oh, Natalie Lind," said the other, who had been speaking of her some minutes before. "Well, that is natural; and I don't say it to their disadvantage. I believe most girls are well-intentioned enough; but of course they grow up in a particular

social atmosphere, and it depends on that what they become. If it is rather fast, the girl sees nothing objectionable in being fast too. If it is religious, the god of her idolatry is a Bishop. If it is sporting, she thinks mostly about horses. Natalie is exceptional because she has been brought up in exceptional circumstances. For one thing, she has been a good deal alone; and she has formed all sorts of beautiful idealisms and aspirations——"

The conversation dropped here; for at the moment Lord Evelyn espied two of his sisters coming along in the slow procession.

"Here come two of the girls," he said to his friend. "How precious demure they look!"

Brand at once rose, and went out from the shadow of the trees, to pay his respects to the two young ladies.

"How do you do, Miss D'Agincourt? How do you do, Miss Frances?"

Certainly no one would have suspected these two very graceful and pleasant-looking girls of being madcap creatures at home. The elder was a tall and slightly built blonde, with large grey eyes set wide apart; the younger a gentle little thing, with brownish eyes, freckles, and a pretty mouth.

"Mamma?" said the eldest daughter, in answer to his inquiries. "Oh, she is behind, bringing up the rear, as it were. We have to go in detachments, or else the police would come and read the riot act against us. Francie and I are the vanguard; and she feels such a good little girl, marching along two and two, just as if she were back at Brighton."

The clear grey eyes—quite demure—glanced in toward the shadows of the trees.

"I see you have got Evelyn there, Mr. Brand. Who is the extraordinary person he is always talking about now—the Maid of Saragossa, or Joan of Arc, or something like that? Do you know her?"

"I suppose you mean Miss Lind."

"I know he has persuaded mamma to go and call on her, and get her to dine with us, if she will come. Now, I call that kind."

"If she accepts, you mean?"

"No, I mean nothing of the sort. Good-bye. If we stay another minute, we shall have the middle detachments overlapping the vanguard. En avant, Francie! Vorwärts!"

She bowed to him and passed on in her grave and stately manner: more calmly observant, more innocent eyes were not in the Park.

He ran the gauntlet of the whole family, and at last encountered the mamma, who brought up the rear with the youngest of her daughters. Lady Evelyn was a tall, somewhat good-looking, elderly lady; who wore her silver-white hair in old-fashioned curls. She was an amiable but strictly matter-of-fact person, who beheld her daughters' mad humours with surprise as well as alarm. What were they for ever laughing at? Besides, it was indecorous. She had not conducted herself in that manner when she lived in her father's home.

Lady Evelyn, who was vaguely aware that Brand knew the Linds, repeated her daughter's information about the proposed visit; and said that if Miss Lind would come and spend the evening with them, she hoped Mr. Brand would come too.

"These girls do tease dreadfully, I know," said their mamma; "but perhaps they will behave a little better before a stranger."

Mr. Brand replied that he hoped Miss Lind would accept the invitation—for during her father's absence she must be somewhat dull—but that even without the protection of her presence he was not afraid to face those formidable young ladies. Whereupon Miss Geraldine—who was generally called the Baby, though she was turned thirteen—glanced at him with a look which said, "Won't you catch it for that!" and the mamma then bade him good-bye, saying that Rosalys would write to him as soon as the evening was arranged.

He had not long to wait for that expected note. The very next night he received it. Miss Lind was coming on Thursday: would that suit him? A quarter to eight.

He was there punctual to the moment. The presence of the whole rabble of girls in the drawing-room told him that this was to be a quite private and domestic dinner-party; on other occasions only two or three of the phalanx—as Miss D'Agincourt described herself and her sisters—were chosen to appear. And, on this especial occasion, there was a fine hubbub of questions and raillery going on—which Brand vainly endeavoured to meet all at once—when he was suddenly rescued. The door was opened, and Miss Lind was announced. The clamour ceased.

She was dressed in black, with a red camellia in her bosom, and another in the magnificent black hair. Brand thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, and at once so graciously proud and gentle. Lady

Evelyn went forward to meet her, and received her very kindly indeed. She was introduced to one or two of the girls. She shook hands with Mr. Brand, and gave him a pleasant smile of greeting. Lady Evelyn had to apologize for her son's absence; he had only gone to write a note.

The tall, beautiful Hungarian girl seemed not in the least embarrassed by all these curious eyes, that occasionally and covertly regarded her while pretending not to do so. Two of the young ladies there were older than she was; yet she seemed more of a woman than any of them. Her self-possession was perfect. She sat down by Lady Evelyn, and submitted to be questioned. The girls afterwards told their brother they believed she was an actress, because of the clever manner in which she managed her train.

But at this moment Lord Evelyn made his appearance—in great excitement, and with profuse apologies.

"But the fact is," said he, producing an evening paper, "the fact is—just listen to this, Natalie: it is the report of a police case."

At his thus addressing her by her Christian name, the mother started somewhat, and the demure eyes of the girls were turned to the floor, lest they should meet any conscious glance.

"Here is a fellow brought before the Hammersmith magistrate for indulging in a new form of amusement. Oh, very pretty! very nice! He had only got hold of a small dog; and he was taking it by the two fore legs, and trying how far he could heave it. Very well; he is brought before the magistrates. He had only heaved the dog two or three times: nothing at all, you know. You think he will get off with a forty shillings'

fine, or something like that. Not altogether! Two months' hard labour—*two solid months' hard labour;* and if I had my will of the brute," he continued, savagely, "I would give him ten years' hard labour, and bury him alive when he came out! However, two months' hard labour is something. I glory in that magistrate: I have just been upstairs writing a note asking him to dine with me. I believe I was introduced to him once."

"Evelyn quite goes beside himself," his mother said to her guest, with half an air of apology, "when he reads about cruelty like that."

"Surely it is better than being callous," said Natalie, speaking very gently.

They went in to dinner; and the young ladies were very well behaved indeed. They did not at all resent the fashion in which the whole attention of the dinner-table was given to the stranger.

"And so you like living in England?" said Lady Evelyn to her.

"I cannot breathe elsewhere," was the simple answer.

"Why," said the matter-of-fact, silver-haired lady, "if this country is notorious for anything, it is for its foggy atmosphere!"

"I think it is famous for something more than that," said the girl, with just a touch of colour in the beautiful face; for she was not accustomed to speak before so many people. "Is it not more famous for its freedom? It is that that makes the air so sweet to breathe."

"Well, at all events, you don't find it very picturesque as compared with other countries. Evelyn tells me you have travelled a great deal."

"Perhaps I am not very fond of picturesqueness," Natalie said, modestly. "When I am travelling through a country, I would rather see plenty of small farms thriving and prosperous than splendid ruins that tell only of oppression and extravagance and the cruelty of war."

No one spoke; so she made bold to continue—but she addressed Lady Evelyn only.

"No doubt it is very picturesque, as you go up the Rhine, or across the See Kreis, or through the Lombard plains, to see every height crowned with its castle. Yes, one cannot help admiring. They are like beautiful flowers that have blossomed up from the valleys and the plains below. But who tilled the land that these should grow there on every height? Are you not forced to think of the toiling wretches who laboured and laboured to carry stone by stone up to the crest of the hill? They did not get much enjoyment out of the grandeur and picturesqueness of the castles."

"But they gave that labour for their own protection," Lady Evelyn said, with a smile. "The great lords and barons were their protectors."

"The great lords and barons said so, at least," said the girl, without any smile at all, "and I suppose the peasantry believed them; and were quite willing to leave their vineyards and go and shed their blood whenever the great lords and barons quarrelled amongst themselves."

"Well said!—well said!" Brand exclaimed quickly; though, indeed, this calm, gentle-eyed, self-possessed girl was in no need of any champion.

"I am afraid you are a great Radical, Miss Lind," said Lady Evelyn.

"Perhaps it is your English air, Lady Evelyn," said the girl, with a smile.

Lord Evelyn's mother, notwithstanding her impassive, unimaginative nature, soon began to betray a decided interest in this new guest; and even something more. She was attracted, to begin with, by the singular beauty of the young Hungarian lady, which was foreign-looking, unusual, picturesque. She was struck by her perfect self-possession, and by the ease and grace of her manner, which was rather that of a mature woman than of a girl of nineteen. But most of all she was interested in her odd talk and opinions, which she expressed with such absolute simplicity and frankness. Was it—Lady Evelyn asked herself—that the girl had been brought up so much in the society of men—that she had neither mother nor sisters—that she spoke of politics and such matters as if it was the most natural thing in the world for women, of whatever age, to consider them as of first importance?

But one chance remark that Natalie made, on the impulse of the moment, did for the briefest possible time break down that charming self-confidence of hers and show her—to the wonder of the English girls—the prey of an alarmed embarrassment. George Brand had been talking of patriotism, and of the scorn that must naturally be felt for the man who would say of his country, "Well, it will last my time. Let me enjoy myself when I can. What do I care about the future of other people?" And then he went on to talk of the larger patriotism, that concerned itself not merely with one's fellow-countrymen, but with one's fellow-

mortals; and how the stimulus and enthusiasm of that wider patriotism should be proportionately stronger; and how it might seek to break down artificial barriers of political systems and religious creeds. Patriotism was a beautiful flame—a star; but here was a sun. Ordinarily, to tell the truth, Brand was but an indifferent speaker—he had all an Englishman's self-consciousness; but now he spoke for Natalie alone, and minded the others but little. Presently Lady Evelyn said, with a smile—

"You, too, Miss Lind, are a reformer, are you not? Evelyn is very mysterious, and I can't quite make out what he means; but at all events it is very kind of you to spare us an evening, when you must be so deeply engaged."

"I?" said Natalie. "Oh no, it is very little that I can do. The work is too difficult and arduous for women, perhaps. But there is one thing that women can do—they can love and honour those who are working for them."

It was spoken impulsively—probably the girl was thinking only of her father. But at the moment she happened to look up; and there were Rosalys D'Agincourt's calmly observant eyes fixed on her. Then some vague echo of what she had said rushed in upon her; she was bewildered by the possible interpretation others might put on the words; and the quick, sensitive blood mounted to her forehead. But fortunately Lady Evelyn, who had missed the whole thing, happened at this very instant to begin talking of orchids; and Natalie struck in with great relief. So that little episode went by.

And, as dinner went on, Brand became more and more convinced that this family was the most delight-

ful family in England. Just so much restraint had left their manner as to render those madcap girls exceedingly frank and good-natured in the courtesy they showed to their guest, and to admit her as a confidante into their ways of bantering each other. And one would herself come round to shift the fire-screen behind Miss Lind to precisely the proper place; and another said that Miss Lind drank water because Evelyn had been so monstrously stupid as not to have any Hungarian wine for her; and another asked if she might call on Miss Lind the following afternoon to take her to some place where some marvellous Japanese curiosities were on view. Then, when they left for the drawing-room, the eldest Miss D'Agincourt put her arm within the arm of their guest, and said—

"Now, dear Miss Lind, please understand that if there was any stranger here at all we should not dream of asking you to sing. Ermentrude and I take all that on our shoulders; we squawk for the whole of the family. But Evelyn has told us so much about your singing——"

"Oh, I will sing for you if you wish it," said Natalie, without hesitation.

Some little time thereafter, Brand was walking up and down the room below, slowly and thoughtfully: he was not much of a wine-drinker.

"Evelyn," he said, suddenly, "I shall soon be able to tell you whether I owe you a life-long gratitude. I owe you much already. Through you I have got some work to do in the world; I am busy, and content. But there is a greater prize."

"I think I can guess what you mean," his companion said, calmly.

"You do?" said the other, with a quick look. "And you do not think I am mad? To go and ask her to be my wife, before she has given me a single word of hope?"

"She has spoken to others about you: I know what she thinks of you," said Lord Evelyn. Then the fine, pale face was slightly flushed. "To tell you the truth, Brand, I thought of this before you ever saw her."

"Thought of what?" said the other, with a stare of surprise.

"That you would be the right sort of man to make a husband for her: she might be left alone in the world at any moment, without a single relation and scarcely a friend."

"Women don't marry for these reasons," said the other, somewhat absently. "And yet—if she were to think of it—it would not be as if I were withdrawing her from everything she takes an interest in. We should be together. I am eager to go forward, even by myself; but with her for a companion—think of that!"

"I have thought of it," said Lord Evelyn, with something of a sad smile. "Often. And there is no man in England more heartily wishes you success than I do. Come, let us go up to the drawing-room."

They went out into the hall. Some one was playing a noisy piece upstairs; it was safe to speak. And then he said—

"Shall I tell you something, Brand? Something that will keep you awake all this night, and not with the saddest of thinking? If I am not mistaken, I fancy you have already 'stole bonny Glenlyon away.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER.

BLACK night lay over the city, and silence; the river flowed unseen through the darkness; but a thousand golden points of fire mapped out the lines of the Embankment and the long curves of the distant bridges. The infrequent sounds that could be heard were strangely distinct, even when they were faint and remote. There was a slight rustling of wind in the trees below the window.

But the night and the silence brought him neither repose nor counsel. A multitude of bewildering audacious hopes and distracting fears strove for mastery in his mind, upsetting altogether the calm and cool judgment on which he prided himself. His was not a nature to harbour illusions; he had a hard way of looking at things; and yet—and yet—might not this chance speech of Lord Evelyn have been something more than a bit of good-humoured raillery? Lord Evelyn was Natalie's intimate friend; he knew all her surroundings; he was a quick observer; he was likely to know if this thing were possible. But, on the other hand, how was it possible that so beautiful a creature, in the perfect flower of her youth, should be without a lover? He forced himself to remember that she and her father seemed to see but little society. Perhaps she was too useful to him, and he would not have her entangle herself with many friends. Perhaps they had led too nomadic a life. But even in hotels abroad, how could she have avoided the admiration she was sure to evoke? And in Florence, mayhap, or Mentone,

or Madrid—and here he began to conjure up a host of possible rivals, all foreigners, of course, and all equally detestable; and to draw pictures for him of *tables d'hôte*, with always the one beautiful figure there, unconscious, gentle, silent, but drawing to her all men's eyes.

There was but the one way of putting an end to this maddening uncertainty. He dared not claim an interview with her; she might be afraid of implying too much by granting it; various considerations might dictate a refusal. But he could write; and, in point of fact, writing materials were on the table. Again and again he had sat down, and taken the pen in his hand, only to get up as often and go and stare out into the yellow glare of the night. For an instant his shadow would fall on the foliage of the trees below and then pass away again like a ghost.

At two and twenty love is reckless, and glib of speech; it takes little heed of the future; the light straw-flame, for however short a period, leaps up merrily enough. But at two and thirty it is more alive to consequences; it is not the present moment, but the duration of life, that it regards; it seeks to proceed with a sure foot. And at this crisis, in the midst of all this irresolution that was unspeakably vexatious to a man of his firm nature, Brand demanded of himself his utmost power of self-control. He would not imperil the happiness of his life by a hasty, importunate appeal. When at length he sat down, determined not to rise until he had sent her this message, he forced himself to write—at the beginning, at least—in a roundabout and indifferent fashion, so that she should not be alarmed. He began by excusing his writing to her,

saying he had scarcely ever had a chance of talking to her, and that he wished to tell her something of what had happened to him since the memorable evening on which he had first met her at her father's house. And he went on to speak to her of a friend of his, who used to amuse himself with the notion that he would like to enter himself at a public school and go through his school-life all over again. There he had spent the happiest of his days; why should he not repeat them? If only the boys would agree to treat him as one of themselves, why should he not be hail-fellow-well-met with them; and once more enjoy the fun of uproarious pillow-battles; and have smuggled tarts and lemonade at night; and tame rabbits where no rabbits should be; and a profound hero-worship for the captain of the school Eleven; and excursions out of bounds, when his excess of pocket-money would enable him to stand treat all round? "Why not?" this friend of his used to say. "Was it so very impossible for one to get back the cares and interests, the ambitions, the amusements, the high spirits of one's boyhood?" And if he, now, were to tell her that a far greater miracle had happened to himself? That at an age when he had fancied he had done and seen most things worth doing and seeing; when the past seemed to contain everything worth having, and there was nothing left but to try how the tedious hours could be got over; when a listless *ennui* was eating his very heart out—that he should be presented as it were with a new lease of life, with stirring hopes and active interests, with a new and beautiful faith, with a work that was a joy in itself, whether any reward was to be or no? And surely he could not fail to express to Lord

Evelyn and to herself his gratitude for this strange thing.

These are but the harsh outlines of what, so far, he wrote; but there was a feeling in it—a touch of gladness and of pathos here and there—that had never before been in any of his writing, and of which he was himself unconscious.

But at this point he paused, and his breathing grew quick. It was so difficult to write in these measured terms. When he resumed, he wrote more rapidly.

What wonder, he made bold to ask her, if amid all this bewildering change, some still stranger dream of what might be possible in the future should have taken possession of him? She and he were leagued in sympathy as regarded the chief object of their lives; it was her voice that had inspired him; might he not hope that they should go forward together, in close friendship at least, if there could be nothing more? And as to that something more, was there no hope? He could give himself no grounds for any such hope; and yet—so much had happened to him, and mostly through her, that he could set no limit to the possibilities of happiness that lay in her generous hands. When he saw her amongst others, he despaired; when he thought of her alone, and of the gentleness of her heart, he dared to hope. And if this declaration of his was distressing to her, how easy it was for her to dismiss and forget it. If he had dared too much, he had himself to blame. In any case she need not fear that her refusal should have the effect of dissociating them in those wider interests and sympathies to which he had pledged himself. He would not relinquish what he had undertaken. And if he had alarmed or offended

her, he appealed to her charity—to that great kindness which she seemed eager to extend to all living creatures. How could such a vision of possible happiness have arisen in his mind without his making one effort, however desperate, to realize it? At the worst, she would forgive.

This was in brief the substance of what he wrote; but when, after many an anxious re-reading, he put the letter in an envelope, he was miserably conscious how little it conveyed of all the hope and desire that had hold of his heart. But then, he argued with himself, if she inclined her ear so far, surely he would have other and better opportunities of pleading with her; whereas, if he had been dreaming of impossibilities, then he and she would meet the more easily in the future that he had not given too vehement an expression to all the love and admiration he felt for her. He could not sacrifice her friendship also—her society—the chances of listening from time to time to the musical, low, soft voice.

Carrying this fateful letter in his hand, he went downstairs and out into the cool night air. And now he was haunted by a hundred doubts. Again and again he was on the point of turning back to add something, to alter something, to find some phrase that would appeal more closely to her heart. And then all of a sudden he convinced himself that he should not have written at all. Why not have gone to see her—at any risk—to plead with herself? But then he would have had to write to beg for a *tête-à-tête* interview; and would not that be more distinctly alarming than this roundabout epistle, which was meant to convey so much indirectly? Finally, he arrived at the pillar letter-box;

and this indisputable fact brought an end to his cogitations. If he had gone walking onwards, he would have wasted the night in fruitless counsel. He would have repeated again and again the sentences he had used; striven to picture her as she read; wondered if he ought not still to go back and strengthen his prayer. But now it was to be yes or no. Well, he posted the letter; and then he breathed more freely. The die was cast, for good or ill.

And, indeed, no sooner was the thing done than his spirits rose considerably; and he walked on with a lighter heart. This solitary London, all lamp-lit and silent, was a beautiful city. "*Schlaf selig und süss,*" the soft stirring of the night-wind seemed to say: let her not dread the message the morning would bring! He thought of the other cities she must have visited; and if—ah, the dream of it!—if he and she were to go away together to behold the glories of the moonlight on the lagoon, and the wonders of the sunrise among the hills! He had seen in Rome, he remembered, a wonderful coronet of rubies: would not that do for the beautiful black masses of hair? Or pearls? She did not appear to have much jewellery. Or rather—seeing that such things are possible between husband and wife—would she not accept the value, and far more than the value, of any jewellery she could desire, to be given away in acts of kindness? That would be more like Natalie.

He walked on, his heart full of an audacious joy. For now this was the picture before him—a Buckinghamshire hill; a red and white house among the beeches; and a spacious lawn looking out on the far and wooded plain, with its villages, and spires, and

tiny curls of smoke. And this foreign young lady become an English house-mistress; proud of her nectarines and pine-apples; proud of her Hungarian horses; proud of the quiet and comfort of the home she can offer to her friends, when they come for a space to rest from their labours. . . . "*Schlaf selig und süss!*" the night-wind seemed to say: "*The white morning is bringing with it a message!*"

To him the morning brought an end to all those golden dreams of the night. The reaction had set in. His old misgivings returned with redoubled force. For one thing, there was a letter from Reitzei, saying that the man Kirski had at length consented to begin to work at his trade, and that Miss Lind need fear no further annoyance; and somehow he did not like to see her name written in this foreign way of writing. She belonged to these foreigners; her cares and interests were not those of one who would feel at home in that Buckinghamshire house; she was remote. And, of course, in her manifold wanderings—in those hotels in which she had to pass the day, when her father was absent at his secret interviews—how could she avoid making acquaintances? Even among those numerous friends of her father's, there must have been some one here or there to accompany her in her drives in the Prater, in her evenings at La Scala, in her morning walk along the Chiaja. He remembered how seldom he had seen her; she might have many more friends in London than he had dreamed of. Who could see her, and remain blind to her beauty? Who could know her, and remain insensible to the fascination of her enthusiasm, her faith in the right, her courage, her hope, her frank friendship with those who would help?

He was impatient with the veteran Waters this morning; and Waters was himself fractious, and inclined to resent sarcasm. He had just heard from Buckinghamshire that his substitute had, for some reason or other, entrusted the keys of the wine-cellar to one of the housemaids; and that that industrious person had seized the opportunity to tilt up all the port-wine she could lay her hands on in order to polish the bottles with a duster.

"Well," said his master, with calm cynicism, "I suppose she collected the cobwebs and sold them to a wine-merchant: they would be invaluable."

Waters said nothing; but resolved to have a word with the young woman when he went down.

The morning was fine; in any case Brand could not have borne the distress of waiting in all day, on the chance of her reply coming. He had to be moving. He walked up to Lisle Street, and saw Reitzei, on the pretext of talking about Kirski.

"Lind will be back in a week," said the pallid-faced smart young man. "He writes with great satisfaction, which always means something in his case. I should not wonder if he and his daughter went to live in the States."

"Oh, indeed," said Brand; but the words made his heart tremble.

"Yes. And if you would only go through the remaining degrees, you might take his place—who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed?" said Brand. "But I don't covet the honour."

There was something in his tone which made the other look up.

"I mean the responsibility," he said, quickly.

"You see," observed Reitzei, leaning back in his chair, "one must admit you are having rather hard lines. Your work is invaluable to us—Lind is most proud of it—but it is tedious and difficult, eh? Now if they were to give you something like the Syrian business——"

"What is that?"

"Oh, only one of the many duties the Society has undertaken," said Reitzei, carelessly. "Not that I approve because the people are Christians; it is because they are numerically weak; and the Mahommedans treat them shamefully. There is no one knows about it; no one to make a row about it; and the Government won't let the poor wretches import arms to defend themselves. Very well: very well, messieurs! But your Government allow the importation of guns for sport. Ha! and then, if one can find money, and an ingenious English firm to make rifle barrels to fit into the sporting-gun stock, can you conceive any greater fun than smuggling these barrels into the country? My dear fellow, it is glorious: we could have five hundred volunteers! But at the same time I say your work is more valuable to us. No one but an Englishman could do it. Every one knows of your success."

Brand thanked Reitzei for his good opinion; and rather absently took up his hat, and left. Instinctively he made his way westward. He was sure to see her, at a distance, taking this morning stroll of hers: might he not guess something from her face as to what her reply would be? She could not have written so soon;

she would take time to consider; even a refusal would, he knew, be gently worded.

In any case, he would see her; and if her answer gave no hope, it would be the last time on which he would follow that graceful figure from afar with his eyes, and wonder to himself what the low and musical voice was saying to Anneli. And as he walked on, he grew more and more down-hearted. It was a certainty that out of all those friends of her father's, some one must have dreamed of possessing this beautiful prize for his own.

When, after not much waiting, he saw Natalie and Anneli come into the Park, he had so reasoned himself into despair that he was not surprised—at least, he tried to convince himself that he was not surprised—to perceive that the former was accompanied by a stranger, the little German maidservant walking not quite with them and yet not altogether behind them. He could almost have expected this; and yet his eyes seemed hot; and he had some difficulty in trying to make out who this might be. And at this great distance he could only gather that he was foreign in appearance, and that he wore a peaked cap in place of a hat.

He dared not follow them now; and he was about to turn away when he saw Natalie's new companion motion to her to sit down on one of the seats. He sat down, too; and he took her hand, and held it in his. What, then?

This man looking on from a distance, and with a bitter heart, had no thought against her. Was it not natural for so beautiful a girl to have a lover? But that this fellow—this foreigner—should degrade her

by treating her as if she were a nursery-maid flirting with one of the soldiers from the barracks down there, this filled him with bitterness and hatred. He turned and walked away, with a firm step. He had no ill thoughts of her, whatever message she might send him. At the worst, she had been generous to him; she had filled his life with love and hope; she had given him a future. If this dream were shattered, at least he could turn elsewhere, and say, "Labour be thou my good."

Meanwhile, of this stranger? He had indeed taken Natalie Lind's hand in his, and Natalie let it remain there, without hesitation.

"My little daughter," said he to her, in Italian, "I could have recognized you by your hands. You have the hands of your mother: no one in the world had more beautiful hands than she had. And now I will tell you about her, if you promise not to cry any more."

It was Calabressa who spoke.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALABRESSA.

When Calabressa called at the house in Curzon Street he was at once admitted; Natalie recognizing the name as that of one of her father's old friends. Calabressa had got himself up very smartly to produce an impression on the little Natalushka whom he expected to see. His military-looking coat was tightly buttoned; he had burnished up the gold braid of his cap; and as he now ascended the stairs he gathered

the ends of his moustache out of his yellow-white beard and curled them round and round his fingers and pulled them out straight. He had already assumed a pleasant smile.

But when he entered the shaded drawing-room, and beheld this figure before him, all the dancing-master's manner instantly fled from him. He seemed thunderstruck; he shrank back a little; his cap fell to the floor; he could not utter a word.

"Excuse me — excuse me, mademoiselle," he gasped out at length, in his odd French. "Ah, it is like a ghost—like other years come back——"

He stared at her.

"I am very pleased to see you, sir," said she to him gently, in Italian.

"Her voice also—her voice also!" he exclaimed, almost to himself, in the same tongue. "Signorina, you will forgive me—but—when one sees an old friend —you are so like—ah, so like——"

"You are speaking of my mother?" the girl said, with her eyes cast down. "I have been told that I was like her. You knew her, signore?"

Calabressa pulled himself together somewhat. He picked up his cap; he assumed a more business-like air.

"Oh yes, signorina, I knew her," he said, with an apparent carelessness, but he was regarding her all the same. "Yes, I knew her well. We were friends long before she married. What, are you surprised that I am so old? Do you know that I can remember you when you were a very little thing—at Dunkirk it was —and what a valiant young lady you were, and you would go to fight the Russians all by yourself! And you—you do not remember your mother?"

"I cannot tell," she said, sadly. "They say it is impossible, and yet—I seem to remember one who loved me—and my grief when I asked for her and found she would never come back—or else that is only my recollection of what I was told by others. But what of that? I know where she is now: she is my constant companion. I know she loved me; I know she is always regarding me; I talk to her so that I am never quite alone; at night I pray to her—as if she were a saint——"

She turned aside somewhat; her eyes were full of tears. Calabressa said quickly—

"Ah, signorina, why recall what is so sad? It is so useless. *Allons donc!* shall I tell you of my surprise when I saw you first? A ghost—that is nothing! It is true, your father warned me. He said, 'The little Natalushka is a woman now.' But how could one believe it?"

She had recovered her composure; she begged him to be seated.

"Bien! One forgets. Then my old mother—my dear young lady, even I, old as I am, have a mother—what does she do but draw a prize in the Austro-Hungarian lottery—a huge prize—enough to demoralize one for life—five thousand florins. More remarkable still, the money is paid. Not so remarkable, my good mother declares she will give half of it to an undutiful son, who has never done very well with money in this world. We come to the *dénouement* quickly. 'What,' said I, 'shall I do with my new-found liberty and my new-found money? To the devil with banks! I will be off and away to the land of fogs, to see my little friend Natalushka and ask her what she thinks of the Russians now. And the result? My little daughter,

you have given me such a fright that I can feel my hands still trembling."

"I am very sorry," said she, with a smile. This gay manner of his had driven away her sad memories. It seemed quite natural to her that he should address her as "My little daughter."

"But where are the fogs? It is a Paradise that I have reached—the air clear and soft—the gardens beautiful. This morning I said to myself, 'I will go early. Perhaps the little Natalushka will be going out for a walk; perhaps we will go together.' No, signorina," said he, with a mock-heroic bow, "it was not with the intention of buying you toys. But was I not right? Do I not perceive by your costume that you were about to go out?"

"That is nothing, signore," said she. "It would be very strange if I could not give up my morning walk for an old friend of my father's."

"*Au contraire*, you shall not give up your walk," said he, with great courtesy. "We will go together. And then you will tell me about your father."

She accepted this invitation without the slightest scruple. It did not occur to her—as it would naturally have occurred to most English girls—that she would rather not go walking in Hyde Park with a person who looked remarkably like the leader of a German band.

But Calabressa had known her mother.

"Ah, signore," said she, when they had got into the outer air, "I shall be so grateful to you if you will tell me about my mother. My father will not speak of her; I dare not awaken his grief again; he must have suffered much. You will tell me about her."

"My little daughter, your father is wise. Why

awaken old sorrows? You must not spoil your eyes with more crying."

And then he went on to speak of all sorts of things, in his rapid, interjectional fashion—of his escape from prison mostly; until he perceived that she was rather silent and sad.

"Come then," said he, "we will sit down on this seat. Give me your hand."

She placed her hand in his without hesitation; and he patted it gently; and said how like it was to the hand of her mother.

"You are a little taller than she was," said he; "a little, not much. Ah, how beautiful she was! She had many sweethearts."

He was silent for a minute or two.

"Some of them richer, some of them of nobler birth, than your father; and one of them her own cousin, whom all her family wanted her to marry. But you know, little daughter, your father is a very determined man——"

"But she loved him the best?" said the girl, quickly.

"Ah, no doubt, no doubt," said Calabressa. "He is very kind to you, is he not?"

"Oh yes. Who could be kinder? But about my mother, signore?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"To say the truth, little daughter, how am I to tell you? I scarcely ever saw her after she married. Before then, you must imagine yourself as you are now to think of her picture; and she was very much beloved; and very fond of horses. Is not that enough to tell? Ah, yes, another thing: she was very brave when there was any danger; and you know all the

family were strong patriots; and one or two got into sad trouble. When her father—that is your grandfather, little daughter—when he failed to escape into Turkey after the assassination——"

Here Calabressa stopped, and then gave a slight wave of his hand.

"These are matters not interesting to you. But when her father had to seek a hiding-place she went with him in despite of everybody. I do not suppose he would be alive now but for her devotion."

"Is my mother's father alive?" the girl said, with eyes wide open.

"I believe so; but the less said about it the better, little daughter."

"Why has my father never told me?" she asked with the same almost incredulous stare.

"Have I not hinted? The less said the better. There are some things no government will amnesty. Your grandfather was a good patriot, little daughter."

Thereafter for some minutes silence. Slight as was the information Calabressa had given her, it was of intensest interest to her. There was much for her to think over. Her mother, whom she had been accustomed to regard as a beautiful saint, placed far above the common ways of earth, was suddenly presented to her in a new light. She thought of her young, handsome, surrounded with lovers, proud-spirited and patriotic, a devoted daughter, a brave woman.

"You also loved her?" she said to Calabressa.

The man started. She had spoken quite innocently—almost absently: she was thinking that he, too, must have loved the brave young Hungarian girl as all the world loved her.

"I?" said Calabressa. "Oh yes: I was a friend of hers for many years. I taught her Italian; she corrected my Magyar. Once her horse ran away; I was walking, and saw her coming; there was a waggon and oxen, and I shouted to the man; he drew the oxen right across the road, and barred the way. Ah, how angry she used to be—she pretended to be—when they told her I had saved her life. She was a bold rider."

Presently Calabressa said, with a lighter air—

"Come, let us talk of something else—of you, *par exemple*. How do you like the English? You have many sweethearts among them, of course."

"No, signore, I have no sweethearts," said Natalie, without any trace of embarrassment.

"What? Is it possible? When I saw your father in Venice, and he told me the little Natalushka had grown to be a woman, I said to him, 'Then she will marry an Englishman.'"

"And what did he say?" the girl asked, with a startled look on her face.

"Oh, little, very little. If there was no possibility, why should he say much?"

"I have no sweethearts," said Natalie, simply; "but I have a friend—who wishes to be more than a friend. And it is now, when I have to answer him, it is now that I know what a sad thing it is to have no mother."

The pathetic vibration that Brand had noticed was in her voice; her eyes were downcast; her hands clasped. For a second or two Calabressa was silent.

"I am not idly curious, my little daughter," he said at length and very gently; "but if you knew how

long your mother and I were friends, you would understand the interest I feel in you, and why I came all this way to see the little Natalushka. So, one question, dear little one. Does your father approve?"

"Ah, how can I tell?"

He took her hand, and his face was grave.

"Listen now," said he; "I am going to give you advice. If your mother could speak to you, this is what she would say. Whatever happens—whatever happens—do not thwart your father's wishes."

She wished to withdraw her hand, but he still held it.

"I do not understand you," she said. "Papa's wishes will always be for my happiness: why should I think of thwarting them?"

"Why, indeed? And again, why? It is my advice to you, my little daughter. Whether you think your father's wishes are for your happiness or not—because, you know, sometimes fathers and daughters have different ideas—do not go against his will."

The hot blood mounted to Natalie's forehead—for the first time during this interview.

"Are you predicting strife, signore? I owe obedience to my father, I know it; but I am not a child. I am a woman, and have my own wishes. My papa would not think of thwarting them."

"Natalushka, you must not be angry with me."

"I am not angry, signore; but you must not suppose that I am quite a child."

"Pardieu, non!" said Calabressa. "I expected to find Natalushka; I find Natalie—ah, heaven! that is the wonder and the sadness of it to me! I think I am talking to your mother: these are her hands. I listen

to her voice: it seems twenty years ago. And you have a proud spirit as she had: again I say—do not thwart your father's wishes, Natalie—rather, Natalushka!"

He spoke with such an obvious kindness and earnestness that she could not feel offended.

"And if you want any one to help you at any time, my little daughter—for who knows the ways of the world, and what may happen?—if your father is sent away, and you are alone, and you want some one to do something for you, then this is what you will say to yourself: 'There is that old fool Calabressa who has nothing in the world to do but smoke cigarettes and twirl his moustache: I will send for Calabressa.' And this I promise, little one, that Calabressa will very soon be at your feet."

"I thank you, signore."

"It is true, I may be away on duty, as your father might be; but I have friends at head-quarters; I have done some service. And if I were to say, 'Calabressa wishes to be relieved from duty; it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands his presence,' I know the answer: 'Calabressa will proceed at once to obey the commands of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.'"

"But who——?"

"No, my little daughter, you must not ask that. I will tell you only that they are all-powerful; that they will protect you—with Calabressa as their agent; and before I leave this city I will give you my address, or rather I will give you an address where you will find some one who will guide you to me. May Heaven grant that there be no need. Why should harm come to one who is so beautiful and so gentle?"

"My mother: was she happy?" she said, quickly.

"Little daughter," said he, sharply, and he threw away her hand, "if you ask me any more questions about your mother, you will make my heart bleed. Do you not understand so simple a thing as that, you who claim to be a woman? You have been stabbing me. Come, come: *allons!*—let us talk of something else—of your friend who wishes to be more than friend—you, wicked little one, who have no sweetheart! And what are those fools of English about? What? But tell me—is he one of us?"

"Oh yes, signore," said she; and instead of showing any shamefacedness, she turned towards him and regarded him with the fearless, soft, dark eyes. "How could you think otherwise? And he is so brave and noble; he is not afraid of sacrificing those things that the English put such store by——"

"English?" said Calabressa.

"Yes," said Natalie; and now she looked down.

"And what does your heart say?"

She spoke very gently in reply.

"Signore, I have not answered him yet; you cannot expect me to answer you."

"*A la bonne heure!* Little traitress, to say she has no sweethearts! Happy Englishman! What, then, do I distress you? It is not so simple? It is an embarrassment, this proposal that he has made to you? But I will not trouble you further with my questions, little daughter: how can an old gaol-bird like myself understand a young linnet-thing that has always been flying and fluttering about in happiness and the free air? *Enfin*, let us go! I perceive your little maid is tired of standing and staring; perhaps it is time for you to go back."

She rose, and the three of them slowly proceeded along the gravelled path.

"Your father does not return until next week: must I wait a whole week in this desert of a town before seeing you again, *petite?*"

"Oh no," said Natalie, smiling; "that is not necessary. If my papa were here now he would certainly ask you to dine with us to-night: may I do so in his place? You will not find much amusement: but Madame Potecki—you knew her husband perhaps?"

"Potecki the Pole, who was killed?"

"Yes. She will play a little music for you. But there are so many amusements in London; perhaps you would rather not spend your evening with two poor solitary creatures like us."

"My little daughter, to hear you speak, that is all I want. It takes twenty years away from my life; I do not know whether to laugh or to cry. But *courage!* we will put a good face on our little griefs. This evening—this evening I will pretend to myself something —I am going to live my old life over again—for an hour; I will blow a horn as soon as I have crossed the Erlau, and they will hear it up at the big house among the pines, where the lights are shining through the dark, and they will send a servant down to open the gates. And you will appear at the hall-door, and say, 'Signor Calabressa, why do you make such a noise to awaken the dogs?' And I will say, 'Dear Miss Berezolyi, the pine-woods are frightfully dark; may I not scare away the ghosts?'"

"It was my mother who received you?" the girl said, in a low voice.

"It was Natalie then; to-night it will be Natalushka."

He spoke lightly, so as not to make these reminiscences too serious. But the conjunction of the two names seemed suddenly to startle the girl. She stopped, and looked him in the face.

"It was you, then," she said, "who sent me the locket."

"What locket?" he said, with surprise.

"The locket the lady dropped into my lap—'*From Natalie to Natalushka.*'"

"I declare to you, little daughter, I never heard of it."

The girl looked bewildered.

"Ah, how stupid I am!" she exclaimed. "I could not understand. But if they always called her Natalie, and me Natalushka——"

She paused for a moment, to collect her thoughts.

"Signor Calabressa, what does it mean?" she said, almost wildly. "If one sends me a locket—'*From Natalie to Natalushka*'—was it my mother's? Did she intend it for me? Did she leave it for me with some one, long ago? How could it come into the hands of a stranger?"

Calabressa himself seemed rather bewildered—almost alarmed.

"My little daughter, you have no doubt guessed right," he said, soothingly. "Your mother may have meant it for you—and—and perhaps it was lost—and just recovered——"

"Signor Calabressa," said she—and he could have fancied it was her mother who was speaking in that low, earnest, almost sad voice, "you said you would do me an act of friendship, if I asked you. I cannot ask my father: he seems too grieved to speak of my mother at any time. But do you think you could find out

who the lady was who brought that locket to me? That would be kind of you, if you could do that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER ANSWER.

HUMPHREYS, the delegate from the north, and O'Halloran, the Irish reporter, had been invited by George Brand to dine with him on this evening—Humphreys having to start for Wolverhampton next day; and the three were just sitting down when Lord Evelyn called in, uninvited, and asked if he might have a plate placed for him. Humphreys was anxious that their host should set out with him for the north in the morning; but Brand would not promise. He was obviously thinking of other things. He was at once restless, preoccupied, and silent.

"I hope, my lord, you have come to put our friend here in better spirits," said Humphreys; blushing a little as he ventured to call one of the Brands of Darlington his friend.

"What is the matter?"

At this moment Waters appeared at the door, with a letter in his hand. Brand instantly rose, went forward to him and took the letter, and retired into an adjoining room. Without looking, he knew from whom it had come.

His hand was shaking as he opened the envelope; but the words that met his eyes were calm.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"Your letter has given me joy and pain. Joy that you still adhere to your noble resolve; that you have

found gladness in your life; that you will work on to the end, whatever the fruit of the work may be. But this other thought of yours—that only distresses me; it clouds the future with uncertainty and doubt, where there should only be clear faith. My dear friend, I must ask you to put away that thought. Let the *feu sacré* of the regenerator, the liberator, have full possession of you; how I should blame myself if I were to distract you from the aims to which you have devoted your life. I have no one to advise me; but this I know is *right*. You will, I think, not misunderstand me—you will not think it unmaidenly of me—if I confess to you that I have written these words with some pain, some touch of regret that all is not possible to you that you may desire. But for one soul one devotion. Do I express myself clearly?—you know English is not my native tongue. If we may not go through life together, in the sense that you mean, we need not be far apart; and you will know, as you go forward in the path of a noble duty, that there is not any one who regards you and the work you will do with a greater pride and affection than your friend,

"NATALIE."

What could it all mean? he asked himself. This was not the letter of a woman who loved another man; she would have been more explicit; she would have given sufficient reason for her refusal. He read again, with a beating heart, with a wild hope, that veiled and subtle expression of regret. Was it not that she was prepared to sacrifice for ever those dreams of a secure and happy and loving life, that come naturally to a young girl, lest they should interfere with what she

regarded as the higher duty, the more imperative devotion? In that case, it was for a firmer nature than her own to take this matter in hand. She was but a child; knowing nothing of the sorrows of the world, of the necessity of protection, of the chances the years might bring. Scarcely conscious of what he did—so eagerly was his mind engaged—he opened a drawer and locked the letter in. Then he went hastily into the other room.

"Evelyn," said he, "will you take my place, like a good fellow? I shall be back as soon as I can. Waters will get you everything you want."

"But about Wolverhampton, Mr. Brand?" shouted Humphreys after him.

There was no answer; he was half-way down the stairs.

When the Hansom arrived in Curzon Street a hurried glance showed him that the dining-room was lit up. She was at home, then: that was enough. For the rest he was not going to trouble himself with formalities when so beautiful a prize might still be within his reach.

He knocked at the door; the little Anneli appeared.

"Anneli," said he, "I want to see Miss Lind for a moment—say I shall not detain her—if there is any one with her——"

"They are in the dining-room, sir; Madame Potecki, and a strange gentleman——"

"Ask your mistress to let me see her for one moment: don't you understand?"

"They are just finishing dinner, sir: if you will step up to the drawing-room they will be there in a minute or two."

But at last he got the little German maid to understand that he wished to see Miss Lind alone, for the briefest possible time; and that she was to carry this message in an undertone to her mistress. By himself he made his way upstairs to the drawing-room; the lamps were lit.

He lifted books, photographs, and what not, with trembling fingers; and put them down again, without knowing it. He was thinking, not looking. And he was trying to force himself into a masterful mood. She was only a child, he kept repeating to himself—only a child, who wanted guidance, instruction, a protecting hand. It was not her fancies, however generous and noble, that should shape the destinies of two lives. A beautiful child, ignorant of the world and its evil: full of dreams of impossible and unnecessary self-sacrifice, she was not one to ordain; surely her way in life was to be led, and cherished, and loved, trusting to the stronger hand for guidance and safety.

There was a slight rustle outside, and presently Natalie entered the room. She was pale—perhaps she looked all the paler that she wore the long, sweeping black dress she had worn at Lady Evelyn's. In silence she gave him her hand; he took it in both his.

"Natalie!"

It was a cry of entreaty; almost of pain; for this fond vision of his of her being only a child, to be mastered and guided, had fled the moment he caught sight of this tall and beautiful woman, whose self-command, despite that paleness and a certain apprehension in the dark eyes, was far greater than his own.

"Natalie, you must give me a clearer answer."

He tried to read the answer in her eyes; but she lowered them as she spoke.

"Was not my answer clear?" she said, gently. "I wished not to give you pain."

"But was all your answer there?" he said, quickly. "Were there no other reasons? Natalie!—don't you know that if you regretted your decision ever so little—if you thought twice about it—if even now you can give me leave to hope that one day you will be my wife—there were no reasons at all in your letter for your refusing—none at all? If you love me even so little that you regret——"

"I must not listen to you," she said, hurriedly. "No, no. My answer was best for us both. I am sorry if it pains you; but you have other things to think of; we have our separate duties in the world—duties that are of first importance. My dear friend," she continued, with an air of appeal, "don't you see how I am situated? I have no one to advise me—not even my father, though I can guess what he would say—I know what he would say. And my heart tells me that I have done right."

"One word," said he. "This you must answer me frankly. Is there no other reason for your refusal? Is your heart free to choose?"

She looked up and met his eyes for a moment; only for a moment.

"I understand you," she said, with some slight colour mounting to the pale clear olive of her brow. "No, there is not any reason like that."

A quick, proud light leapt into his eyes.

"Then," said he, "I refuse to accept your refusal. Natalie, you will be my wife!"

"Oh, do not say that—do not think of it. I have done wrong even to listen, to let you speak——"

"But what I say is true. I claim you, as surely as I now hold your hand——"

"Hush!"

There were two people coming into the room; he did not care if there were a regiment. He relinquished her hand, it is true; but there was a proud and grateful look on his face; he did not even turn to regard the new-comers.

These were Madame Potecki and Calabressa. The little Polish lady had misconstrued Natalie's parting words to mean that some visitors had arrived, and that she and Calabressa were to follow when they pleased. Now that they had appeared in the drawing-room, they could not fail to perceive how matters stood, and, in fact, the little gentlewoman was on the point of retiring. But Natalie was quite mistress of the situation. She reminded Madame Potecki that she had met Mr. Brand before. She introduced Calabressa to the stranger, saying that he was a friend of her father's.

"It is opportune—it is a felicitous circumstance," said Calabressa, in his nasal French. "Mademoiselle, behold the truth. If I do not have a cigarette after my food, I die—veritably I die. Now your friend, the friend of the house, surely he will take compassion on me; and we will have a cigarette together in some apartment."

Here he touched Brand's elbow, having sidled up to him. On any other occasion, Brand would have

resented the touch, the invitation, the mere presence, of this theatrical-looking albino. But he was not in a captious mood. How could he refuse when he heard Natalie say, in the soft low voice—

"Will you be so kind, Mr. Brand? Anneli will light up papa's little smoking-room."

Directly afterwards he found himself in the small study, alone with this odd-looking person, whom he easily recognized as the stranger who had been walking in the Park with Natalie in the morning. Closer inspection rendered him less afraid of this rival.

Calabressa rolled a cigarette between his fingers, and lit it.

"I ask your pardon, monsieur. I ask your pardon beforehand. I am about to be impertinent; it is necessary. If you will tell me some things, I will tell you some things, which it may be better for you to know. First, then, I assume that you wish to marry that dear child, that beautiful young lady upstairs."

"My good friend, you are a little bit too outrageous," said Brand.

"Ah? Then I must begin? You know, perhaps, that the mother of this young lady is alive?"

"Alive!"

"I perceive you do not know," said Calabressa, coolly. "I thought you would know—I thought you would guess. A child might guess. She told me you had seen the locket—*Natalie to Natalushka*—was not that enough?"

"If Miss Lind herself did not guess that her mother was alive, how should I?"

"If you have been brought up for sixteen or eighteen years to mourn one as dead, you do not

quickly imagine that he or she is not dead: you perceive?"

"Well, it is extraordinary enough," said Brand, thoughtfully. "With such a daughter, if she has the heart of a mother at all, how could she remain away from her for sixteen years?"

A thought struck him; and his forehead coloured quickly.

"There was no disgrace?"

At this word Calabressa started; and the small eyes flashed fire.

"I tell you, monsieur, that it is not in my presence that any one must mention the word disgrace and also the name of Natalie Berezolyi. No; I will answer —I myself—I will answer for the good name of Natalie Berezolyi, by the bounty of Heaven!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You are ignorant—you made a mistake. And I—well, you perceive, monsieur, that I am not ashamed to confess—I loved her; she was the radiant light, the star of my life!"

"*La lumière rayonnante, l'étoile de ma vie!*"—the phrases sounded ridiculous enough when uttered by this histrionic person; but even his self-conscious gesticulation did not offend Brand. This man, at all events, had loved the mother of Natalie.

"Then it was some very powerful motive that kept mother and daughter apart," said he.

"Yes, I cannot explain it all to you, if I quite know it all. But every year the mother comes with a birthday present of flowers for the child; and watches to see her once or twice; and then away back she goes, to the retreat of her father. Ah, the devotion of that

beautiful saint! If there is a Heaven at all, Natalie Berezolyi will be among the angels."

"Then you have come to tell Natalie that her mother is alive. I envy you. How grateful the girl will be to you!"

"I? What, I? No, truly, I dare not. And that is why I wish to speak to you: I thought perhaps you would guess, or find out: then I say, do not utter a word! Why do I give you this secret? Why have I sought to speak with you, monsieur? Well, if you will not speak, I will. Something the little Natalushka said —to me she must always be the little Natalushka in name, though she is so handsome a woman now— something she said to me revealed a little secret. Then I said, 'Perhaps Natalushka will have a happier life than Natalie has had, only her husband must be discreet.' Now, monsieur, listen to me. What I said to Natalushka, I say to you: do not thwart her father's wishes. He is a determined man, and angry when he is opposed."

"My good sir, other people may have an ounce or two of determination also. You mean that I must never let Natalie know that her mother is alive, for fear of Lind? Is that what you mean? Come, then!"

He strode to the door, and had his hand on the handle, when Calabressa jumped up and caught him and interposed.

"For Heaven's sake—for Heaven's sake, monsieur, why be so inconsiderate, so rash?"

"Has the dread of this man Lind frightened you out of your wits?"

"He is invulnerable—and implacable," said Calabressa. "But he is a good friend, when he has his

own way. Why not be friends? You will have to ask him for his daughter. Consider, monsieur: that is something."

"Well, there is reason in that," Brand said, reflectively. "And I am inclined to be friendly with every one to-night, Signor Calabressa. It may be that Lind has his reasons; and he is the natural guardian of his daughter —at present. But she might have another guardian, Signor Calabressa?"

"The wicked one!—she has promised herself to you? And she told me she had no sweethearts, the rogue!"

"No, she has not promised. But what may not one dare to hope for, when one sees her so generous and kind? She is like her mother, is she not? Now I am going to slip away, Signor Calabressa; when you have had another cigarette, will you go upstairs and explain to the two ladies that I have three friends who are now dining at my house, and I must get back to them?"

Calabressa rose, and took the taller man's hand in his.

"I think our little Natalushka is right in trusting herself to you; I think you will be kind to her; I know you will be brave enough to protect her. All very well. But you English are so headstrong. Why not a little caution, a little prudence, to smooth the way through life?"

Brand laughed; but he had taken a liking to this odd-looking man.

"Now, good night, Signor Calabressa. You have done me a great service. And if Natalie's mother wishes to see her daughter—well, I think the opportunity will come. In the mean time, I will be quite cautious and prudent, and compromise nobody; even if I cannot

wholly promise to tremble at the name of the Invulnerable and the Implacable."

"Ah, monsieur," said Calabressa, with a sigh—his gay gesticulation having quite left him—"I hope I have done no mischief. It was all for the little Natalushka. It will be so much better for you and for her to be on good terms with Ferdinand Lind."

"We will see," Brand said, lightly. "The people in this part of the world generally do as they're done by."

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE CULTURVEREIN.

On calm reflection Calabressa gave himself the benefit of his own approval; and on the whole was rather proud of his diplomacy. He had revealed enough, and not too much; he had given the headstrong Englishman prudent warnings and judicious counsel; he had done what he could for the future of the little Natalushka, who was the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. But there was something more.

He went upstairs.

"My dear little one," he said, in his queer French, "behold me—I come alone. Your English friend sends a thousand apologies—he has to return to his guests: is it an English custom to leave guests in such a manner? Ah, Madame Potecki, there is a time in one's life when one does strange things, is there not? When a farewell before strangers is hateful—impossible; when you rather go away silently than come before strangers and shake hands and all the rest. What, wicked little one, you look alarmed? Is it a secret, then? Does not Madame guess anything?"

"I entreat you, Signor Calabressa, not to speak in riddles," said Natalie, hastily. "See, here is a telegram from papa. He will be back in London on Monday next week. You can stay to see him, can you not?"

"Mademoiselle, do you not understand that I am not my own master for two moments in succession? For this present moment I am; the next I may be under orders. But if my freedom, my holiday, lasts—yes, I shall be glad to see your father, and I will wait. In the mean time, I must use up my present moment. Can you give me the address of Vincent Beratinsky?"

She wrote it down for him; it was a number in Oxford Street.

"Now I will add my excuses to those of the tall Englishman," said he, rising. "Good night, Madame. Good night, Mademoiselle—truly, it is a folly to call you the little Natalushka, who are taller than your beautiful mother. But it was the little Natalushka I was thinking about for many a year. Good night, wicked little one, with your secrets!"

He kissed her hand, bowed once more to the little Polish lady, and left.

When, after considerable difficulty—for he was exceedingly near-sighted—he made out the number in Oxford Street, he found another caller just leaving. This stranger glanced at him; and instantly said, in a low voice—

"The night is dark, brother."

Calabressa started; but the other gave one or two signs that reassured him.

"I knew you were in London, signore; and I recognized you—we have your photograph in Lisle Street. My name is Reitzei——"

"Ah!" Calabressa exclaimed, with a new interest, as he looked at the pallid-faced young man.

"And if you wish to see Beratinsky, I will take you to him. I find he is at the Culturverein: I was going there myself." So Calabressa suffered himself to be led away.

At this time the Culturverein used to meet in a large hall in a narrow lane off Oxford Street. It was an association of persons, mostly German, connected in some way or other with art, music, or letters—a merry-hearted, free-and-easy little band of people, who met every evening to laugh and talk and joke and generally forget the world and all its cares. The evening usually began with Bavarian beer, sonatas, and comic lectures; then Rhine wines began to appear, and of course these brought with them songs of love, and friendship, and patriotism; occasionally, when the older and wiser folk had gone, sweet champagne and a wild frolic prevailed until daylight came to drive the revellers out. Beratinsky belonged to the Verein by reason of his having, at one time, betaken himself to water-colour drawing, in order to keep himself alive.

When Calabressa entered the large, long hall, the walls of which were plentifully hung with sketches in colour and cartoons in black and white, the *fertig!—los!* period had not arrived. On the contrary, the meeting was exceedingly demure, almost dull; for a German music-professor, seated at the piano on the platform, was playing one of his own compositions, which, however beautiful, was of considerable length; and his audience had relapsed into half-hushed conversation, over their light cigars and tall glasses of Bairisch.

Beratinsky had to come along to the entrance-hall

to enter the names of his visitors in a book. He was a little man, somewhat corpulent, with bushy black eyebrows, intensely black eyes, and black closely cropped beard. The head was rather handsome; the figure not.

"Ah, Calabressa, you have come alive again," he said, speaking in pretty fair Italian. "We heard you were in London. What is it?"

The last phrase was uttered in a low voice, though there was no bystander. But Calabressa with a lofty gesture, replied—

"My friend, we are not always on commissions. Sometimes we have a little liberty—a little money—a notion in our head. And if one cannot exactly travel *en prince, n'importe!* we have our little excursion. And if one has one's sweetheart to see? Do you know, friend Beratinsky, that I have been dining with Natalie —the little Natalushka, as she used to be called?"

Beratinsky glanced quickly at him, with the black, piercing eyes.

"Ah, the beautiful child! the beautiful child!" Calabressa exclaimed, as if he were addressing some one not present. "The mouth sweet, pathetic, like that in Titian's Assumption: you have seen the picture in the Venice Academy? But she is darker than Titian's Virgin; she is of the black, handsome Magyar breed, like her mother. You never saw her mother, Beratinsky?"

"No," said the other, rather surlily. "Come, sit down, and have a cigar."

"A cigarette—a cigarette and a little cognac, if you please," said Calabressa, when the three companions had gone along to the middle of the hall and

taken their seats. "Ah, it was such a surprise to me: the sight of her grown to be a woman—and the perfect, beautiful image of her mother—the very voice too—I could have thought it was a dream."

"Did you come here to talk of nothing but Lind's daughter?" said Beratinsky, with scant courtesy.

"Precisely," remarked Calabressa, in absolute good humour. "But before that, a word."

He glanced round this assemblage of foreign-looking persons, no doubt guessing at the various nationalities indicated by physique and complexion—Prussian, Pole, Rhinelander, Swiss, and what not. If the company, in English eyes, might have looked Bohemian, that is to say, unconventional in manner and costume, the Bohemianism at all events was of a well-to-do, cheerful, good-humoured character. There was a good deal of talking besides the music.

"These gentlemen," said Calabressa, in a low voice, "are they Friends—are they with us?"

"Only one or two," said Beratinsky.

"You do not come here to proselytize, then?"

"One must amuse oneself, sometimes," said the little, fat, black-haired Pole, somewhat gruffly.

"Then one must take care what one says?"

"I presume that is generally the case, friend Calabressa."

But Calabressa was not offended. He was interested in what was going on.

"Par exemple," he said, in his airy way, "que vient faire là le drôle?"

The music had come to an end, and the spectacled professor had retired amid a thunder of applause. His successor, who had attracted Calabressa's attention,

was a gentleman who had mounted on a high easel an immense portfolio of cartoons roughly executed in crayon; and as he exhibited them one by one, he pointed out their characteristics with a long stick, after the manner of a showman. His demeanour was serious; his face was grave; his tone was simple and business-like. But as he unfolded these rude drawings, Calabressa, who understood but little German, was more and more astonished to find the guttural laughter around him increase and increase until the whole place resounded with roars, while some of the old Herren held their sides in pain, as the tears of this gigantic mirth streamed down their cheeks. Those who were able hammered loud applause on the table before them; others rolled in their chairs; many could only lie back and send their merriment up to the reverberating roof in shrill shrieks and yells.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it all about?" said Calabressa. "Have the people gone mad?"

"Illustrations of German proverbs," said Beratinsky, who, despite his surly manner, was himself forced to smile.

Well, Calabressa had indeed come here to talk about Lind's daughter; but it was impossible amid this wild surging to and fro of Olympian laughter. At last, however, the showman came to an end of his cartoons, and solemnly made his bow, and amid tumultuous cheering resumed his place among his companions.

There was a pause, given over to chatter and joking; and Calabressa quickly embraced this opportunity.

"You are a friend of the little Natalushka—of the beautiful Natalie, I should say, perhaps?"

"Lind's daughter does not choose to have many friends," said Beratinsky, curtly.

This was not promising; and, indeed, the corpulent little Pole showed great disinclination to talk about the young lady who had so laid hold of Calabressa's heart. But Calabressa was not to be denied, when it was the welfare of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi that was concerned.

"Yes, yes, friend Beratinsky, of course she is very much alone. It is rather a sad thing for a young girl to be so much alone."

"And if she chooses to be alone?" said Beratinsky, with a sharpness that resembled the snarl of a terrier.

Perhaps it was to get rid of the topic that Beratinsky here joined in a clamorous call for "Nägeli!" "Nägeli!" Presently a fresh-coloured young Switzer, laughing and blushing tremendously, went up to the platform and took his seat at the piano, and struck a few noisy chords. It was a Tyrolese song he sung, with a jodel refrain of his own invention:

Hat einer ein Schätzerl,
So bleibt er dabei,
Er nimmt sie zum Weiberl,
Und liebt sie recht treu.
Dann fängt man die Wirthschaft
Gemeinschaftlich an,
Und liebt sich, und herzt sich
So sehr als man kann!

Great cheering followed the skilfully executed jodel. In the midst of it one of the members rose and said in German—

"Meine Herren! You know our good friend Nägeli is going to leave us; perhaps we shall not see him

again for many years. I challenge you to drink this toast: 'Nägeli, and his quick return!' I say to him what some of the shopkeepers in our Fatherland say to their customers; 'Kommen Sie bald wieder!'"

Here there was a great shouting of "Nägeli! Nägeli!" until one started the chorus, which was immediately and sonorously sung by the whole assemblage—

Hoch soll er leben!
Hoch soll er leben!
Dreimal hoch!

Another pause, chiefly devoted to the ordering of Hochheimer and the lighting of fresh cigars. The souls of the sons of the Fatherland were beginning to warm.

"Friend Beratinsky," said the anxious-hearted albino, "perhaps you know that many years ago I knew the mother of Natalie Lind—she was a neighbour—a companion—of mine; and I am interested in the little one. A young girl sometimes has need of friends. Now, you are in a position——"

"Friend Calabressa, you may save your breath," said the other, coldly. "The young lady might have had my friendship if she had chosen. She did not choose. I suppose she is old enough—and proud enough—to choose her own friends. Yes, yes, friend Calabressa, I have heard. But we will say nothing more: now listen to this comical fellow."

Calabressa was not thinking of the young Englishman who now sat down to the piano; a strange suspicion was beginning to fill his mind. Was it possible, he began inwardly to ask, that Vincent Beratinsky had himself aspired to marry the beautiful Hungarian girl?

This good-looking young English fellow, with a

gravity equal to that of the sham showman, explained to his audience that he was composing an operetta, of which he would give them a few passages. He was a skilful pianist. He explained, as his fingers ran up and down the keys, that the scene was in Ratcliffe Highway. A tavern: a hornpipe. Jack ashore. Unseemly squabbles—here there were harsh discords and shrill screams. Drunkenness; the music getting very helpless. Then the daylight comes—the chirping of sparrows—Jack wanders out—the breath of the morning stirs his memories—he thinks of other days. Then comes in Jack's song, which neither Calabressa nor any one else present could say was meant to be comic, or pathetic, or a demoniac mixture of both. The accompaniment which the handsome young English fellow played was at once rhythmical, and low, and sad, like the wash of waves:—

O the days were long,
And the summers were long,
When Jane and I went courtin';
The hills were blue beyond the sky;
The heather was soft where we did lie;
We kissed our fill, did Jane and I,
When Jane and I went courtin'.

When Jane and I went courtin',
O the days were long,
And the summers were long!
We walked by night beyond the quay;
Above, the stars; below, the sea;
And I kissed Jane, and Jane kissed me,
When Jane and I went courtin'.

But Jane she married the sodger-chap;
An end to me and my courtin'.
And I took ship, and here I am;
And where I go, I care not a damn—

Rio, Jamaica, Seringapatam—
Good-bye to Jane and the courtin'!

This second professor of gravity was abundantly cheered too, when he rose from the piano; for the music was quaint and original, with a sort of unholy, grotesque pathos running through it. Calabressa resumed:

"My good Beratinsky, what is it that you have heard?"

"No matter. Natalie Lind has no need of your good offices, Calabressa. She can make friends for herself, and quickly enough, too."

Calabressa's eyes were not keen, but his ears were; he detected easily the personal rancour in the man's tone.

"You are speaking of some one: the Englishman?"

Beratinsky burst out laughing.

"Listen, Reitzei! Even my good friend Calabressa perceives. He, too, has encountered the Englishman. Oh yes, we must all give way to him; else he will stamp on our toes with his thick English boots. You, Reitzei: how long is he to allow you to retain your office?"

"Better for him if he does not interfere with me," said the younger man. "I was always against the English being allowed to become officers. They are too arrogant; they want everything under their direction. Take their money, but keep them outside: that would have been my rule."

"And this Englishman," said Beratinsky, with a smile, though there was the light of malice in his eye, "this Englishman is not content with wanting to have the mastery of poor devils like you and me; he also wishes to marry the beautiful Natalie—the beautiful Natalie who has hitherto been as proud as the Princess

Brunhilda. Now, now, friend Calabressa; do not protest. Every one has ears, has eyes. And when papa Lind comes home—when he finds that this Englishman has been making a fool of him—and professing great zeal when he was only trying to steal away the daughter: what then, friend Calabressa?"

"A girl must marry," said Calabressa.

"I thought she was too proud to think of such things," said the other, scornfully. "However, I entreat you to say no more. What concern have I with Natalie Lind? I tell you—let her make more new friends."

Calabressa sat silent, his heart as heavy as lead. He had come with some notion that he would secure one other—powerful and in all of Lind's secrets—on whom Natalie could rely, should any emergency occur in which she needed help. But these jealous and envious taunts, these malignant prophecies, only too clearly showed him in what relation Vincent Beratinsky stood with regard to the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi and the Englishman, her lover.

Calabressa sat silent. When some one began to play the zither, he was thinking not of the Culturverein in London, but of the dark pine-woods above the Erlau, and of the house there, and of Natalie Berezolyi as she played in the evening. He would ask Natalushka if she, too, played the zither.

CHAPTER XX.

FIDELIO.

GEORGE BRAND walked away from the house in Curzon Street in a sort of bewilderment of hope and happiness and gratitude. He would even try to accept

Calabressa's well-meant counsel: why should he not be friends with everybody? The world had grown very beautiful; there was to be no more quarrelling in it, or envy, or malice.

In the dark he almost ran against a ragged little child who was selling flowers.

"Will you buy a rosebud, sir?" said she.

"What?" he said, severely, "selling flowers at this time of night? Get away home with you, and get your supper, and go to bed"—but he spoiled the effect of his sharp admonition by giving the girl all the silver he had in his pocket.

He found the little dinner-party in a most loquacious mood. O'Halloran in especial was in full swing. The internal economy of England was to be readjusted. The capital must be transferred to the centre of the real wealth and brain-power of the country—that is to say, somewhere about Leeds or Manchester. This proposition greatly pleased Humphreys, the man from the north, who was quite willing to let the Royal Academy, the South Kensington and National Galleries, and the British Museum remain in London, so long as the seat of government was transferred to Huddersfield or thereabouts. But O'Halloran drew such a harrowing picture of the effect produced on the south of England intellect by its notorious and intense devotion to the arts, that Humphreys was almost convicted of cruelty.

However, if these graceless people thought to humbug the hard-headed man from the north, he succeeded on one occasion in completely silencing his chief enemy, O'Halloran. That lover of paradox and idle speculation was tracing the decline of superstition to the introduction of the use of steam, and was showing how,

wherever railways went in India, ghosts disappeared; whereupon the Darlington man calmly retorted that, as far as he could see, the railways in this country were engaged in making as many ghosts as they could possibly disperse in India. This flank attack completely surprised and silenced the light skirmisher, who sought safety in lighting another cigar.

More serious matters, however, were also talked about; and Humphreys was eager that Brand should go down to Wolverhampton with him next morning. Brand pleaded but for one day's delay. Humphreys reminded him that certain members of the Political Committee of the Trades Union Congress would be at Wolverhampton, and that he had promised to see them. After that, silence.

At last, as Humphreys and O'Halloran were leaving, Brand said, with an effort—

"No, it is no use, Humphreys. I *must* remain in London one more day. You go down to-morrow; I shall come by the first train next morning. Molyneux and the others won't be leaving for some days."

"Very well, sir; good night, sir."

Brand returned into the room, and threw himself into an easy-chair; his only companion now was his old friend Evelyn.

The younger man regarded him.

"I can tell the whole story, Brand; I have been reading it in your face. You were troubled and perplexed before you got that letter. It gave you some hope. Off you went to see Natalie; you came back with something in your manner that told me you had seen her and had been received favourably. Now it is only one more day of happiness you hunger for, be-

fore going up to the hard work of the north. Well, I don't wonder. But, at the same time, you look a little too restless and anxious for a man who has just won such a beautiful sweetheart."

"I am not so lucky as that, Evelyn," said he, absently.

"What: you did not see her?"

"Oh yes, I saw her. And I hope. But of course one craves for some full assurance, when such a prize is within reach. And—and I suppose one's nerves are a little excited, so that you imagine possibilities and dangers——"

He rose and took a turn up and down the room.

"It is the old story, Evelyn. I distrust Lind."

"What has that to do with it?"

"As you say, what has that to do with it? If I had Natalie's full promise, I should care for nothing. She is a woman; she is not a school-girl, to be frightened. If I had only that, I should start off for the north with a light heart."

"Why not secure it, then?"

"Perhaps it is scarcely fair to force myself on her at present, until her father returns. Then she will be more her own mistress. But the doubt—I don't know when I may be back from the north——" At last he stopped short. "Yes, I will see her to-morrow at all hazards."

By-and-by he began to tell his friend of the gay-hearted old albino he had encountered at Lind's house; though in the mean time he reserved to himself the secret of Natalie's mother being alive.

"Lind must have an extraordinary faculty," he said at length, "of inspiring fear, and of getting people to obey him."

"He does not look a ferocious person," Lord Evelyn said, with a smile. "I have always found him very courteous and pleasant—frank, amiable, and all the rest of it."

"And yet here is this man Calabressa, an old friend of his; and he talks of Lind with a sort of mysterious awe. He is not a man whom you must think of thwarting. He is the Invulnerable, the Implacable. The fact is, I was inclined to laugh at my good friend Calabressa; but all the same, it was quite apparent that the effect Lind had produced on his mind was real enough."

"Well, you know," said Lord Evelyn, "Lind has a great organization to control, and he must be a strict disciplinarian. It is the object of his life; everything else is of minor importance. Even you confess that you admire his tremendous power of work."

"Yes, I do. I admire his administrative capacity; it is wonderful. But I don't believe for a moment that it was his mind that projected this big scheme. That must have been the work of an idealist—perhaps of a dozen of them all adding and helping. I think he almost said as much to me one night. His business is to keep the machinery in working order; and he does it to perfection."

"There is one thing about him: he never forgets, and he never forgives. You remember the story of Count Verdt?"

"I have cause to remember it. I thought for a moment the wretch had committed suicide because I caught him cheating."

"I have been told that Lind played with that fellow like a cat with a mouse. Verdt got hints from time

to time that his punishment as a traitor was overtaking him; and yet he was allowed to live on, in constant fear. And it was the Camorra, and not Lind, or any of Lind's friends, who finished him after all."

"Well, that was implacable enough, to be sure; to have death dogging the poor wretch's heels, and yet refusing to strike."

"For myself, I don't pity him much," said Lord Evelyn, as he rose and buttoned his coat. "He was a fool, to think he could play such a trick and escape the consequences. Now, Brand, how am I to hear from you to-morrow? You know, I am in a measure responsible."

"However it ends, I am grateful to you, Evelyn; you may be sure of that. I will write to you from Wolverhampton, and let you know the worst, or the best."

"The best, then: we will have no worsts."

He said good-bye, and went whistling cheerfully down the narrow oak staircase. He at least was not very apprehensive about the results of the next day's interview.

But how brief was this one day, with its rapidly passing opportunities; and then the stern necessity for departure and absence. He spent half the night in devising how best he could get speech of her, in a roundabout fashion, without the dread of the interference of friends. And at last he hit upon a plan, which might or might not answer; but he could think of nothing else.

He went in the morning and secured a box at Covent Garden for that evening. Then he called at Lisle Street, and got Calabressa's address. He found

Calabressa in his lodgings, shivering and miserable, for the day was wet, misty, and cold.

"You can escape from the gloom of our climate, Signor Calabressa," said he. "What do you say to going to the opera to-night?"

"Your opera?" said he, with a gesture indicative of still deeper despair. "You forget I come from the home, the nursery of opera."

"Yes," said Brand, good-naturedly. "Great singers train in your country, but they sing here; that is the difference. Do not be afraid; you will not be disappointed. See, I have brought you a box; and if you want companions, why not ask Miss Lind and Madame Potecki to go with you and show you the ways of our English opera-houses?"

"Ah, the little Natalushka!" said Calabressa, eagerly. "Will she go? Do you think she will go? *Ma foi*, it is not often I have the chance of taking such a beautiful creature to the opera, if she will go. What must I do?"

"You will have to go and beg her to be kind to you. Say you have the box—you need not mention how: ask if she will escort you, she and Madame Potecki. Say it is a kindness: she cannot help doing a kindness."

"There you are right, monsieur: do not I see it in her eyes; can I not hear it in her voice?"

"Well, that you must do at once, before she goes out for her walk at noon."

"To go out walking, on a day like this?"

"She will go out, nevertheless; and you must go and intercept her, and pray her to do you this kindness."

"*Après?*"

"You must come to me again, and we will get an English evening costume for you somehow. Then, two bouquets; I will get those for you, and send them to the box to await you."

"But you yourself, monsieur; will you not be of the party?"

"Perhaps you had better say nothing about me, signore; for one is so busy now-a-days. But if I come into the stalls; if I see you and the ladies in the box, then I shall permit myself to call upon you; do you understand?"

"Parfaitement," said Calabressa, gravely. Then he laughed slightly. "Ah, monsieur, you English are not good diplomatists. I perceive that you wish to say more; that you are afraid to say more; that you are anxious and a little bit demure, like a girl. What you wish is this, is it not: if I say to Madame Potecki, 'Madame, I am a stranger: will you show me the promenade, that I behold the costumes of the beautiful English ladies?' Madame answers, 'Willingly.' We go to see the costumes of the beautiful English ladies. Why should you come? You would not leave the young lady all alone in the box?"

"Calabressa," he said, frankly, "I am going away to-morrow morning: do you understand that?"

Calabressa bowed gravely.

"To comprehend that is easy. Allons, let us play out the little plot, for the amusement of that rogue of a Natalushka. And if she does not thank me—eh, bien! perhaps her papa will: who knows?"

Before the overture began that evening, Brand was in his seat in the stalls; and he had scarcely sat down when he knew, rather than saw, that certain figures

were coming into the box which he had been covertly watching. The opera was *Fidelio*—that beautiful story of a wife's devotion and courage and reward. As he sat and listened, he knew she was listening too; and he could almost have believed it was her own voice that was pleading so eloquently with the jailer to let the poor prisoners see the light of day for a few minutes in the garden. Would not that have been her prayer too, in similar circumstances? Then Leonora, disguised as a youth, is forced to assist in the digging of her own husband's grave. Pizarro enters; the unhappy prisoners are driven back to their cells and chains; and Leonora can only call down the vengeance of Heaven on the head of the tyrant.

At the end of the act Brand went up to the box and tapped outside. It was opened from within; and he entered. Natalie turned to receive him; she was a little pale, he thought; he took a seat immediately behind her; and there was some general talk until the opening of the second act restored silence.

For him it was a strange silence, that the music outside did not disturb. Sitting behind her, he could study the beautiful profile and the outward curve of her dark eyelashes; he could see where here and there a delicate curl of the raven-black hair, escaping from the mob-cap of rose-red silk, lay about the small ear or wandered down to the shapely white neck; he could almost, despite the music, fancy he heard her breathe, as the black gossamer and scarlet flowers of an Indian shawl stirred over the shining satin dress. Her fan and handkerchief were perfumed with white-rose.

And to-morrow he would be in Wolverhampton, amid grimy streets and dirty houses in a leaden-hued

atmosphere laden with damp and the fumes of chimneys, practically alone, with days of monotonous work before him, and solitary evenings to be spent in cheerless inns. What wonder if this seemed some brief vision of Paradise—the golden light and glowing colour, the soft strains of music, the scent of white-rose?

Doubtless Natalie had seen this opera of Fidelio many a time before; but she was always intently interested in music; and she had more than once expressed in Brand's hearing her opinion of the conduct of the ladies and gentlemen who make an opera or a concert or a play a mere adjunct to their own foolish laughter and tittle-tattle. She recognized the serious aims of a great artist; she listened with deep attention and respect; she could talk idly elsewhere and at other times. And so there was scarcely a word said—except of involuntary admiration—as the opera proceeded. But in the scene where the disguised wife discovers her husband in the prison—where, as Pizarro is about to stab him, she flings herself between them to protect him—Brand could see that Natalie Lind was fast losing her manner of calm and critical attention, and yielding to a profounder emotion. When Leonora reveals herself to her husband, and swears that she will save him even at such a juncture from his vindictive enemy—

"Sì, sì, mio dolce amico,
La tua Eleonora ti salverà;
Affronto il suo furor!"

the girl gave a slight, convulsive sob, and her hands were involuntarily clasped. Then, as every one knows, Leonora draws a pistol from her bosom and confronts

the tyrant; a trumpet is heard in the distance; relief is near; and the act winds up with the joyful duet between the released husband and the courageous wife —*"Destin, destin ormai felice!"*

Here it was that Calabressa proposed he should escort Madame Potecki to the cooler air of the large saloon; and Madame, who had been young herself, and guessed that the lovers might like to be alone for a few minutes, instantly and graciously acquiesced. But Natalie rose also—a little quickly—and said that Madame Potecki and herself would be glad to have some coffee; and could that be got in the saloon?

Madame Potecki and her companion led the way; but then Brand put his hand on the arm of Natalie and detained her.

"Natalie!" he said, in a low and hurried voice, "I am going away to-morrow. I don't know when I shall see you again. Surely you will give me some assurance —some promise; something I can repeat to myself. Natalie, I know the value of what I am asking; you will give yourself to me?"

She stood by the half-shut door, pale, irresolute, and yet outwardly calm. Her eyes were cast down; she held her fan firmly with both hands.

"Natalie, are you afraid to answer?"

Then the young Hungarian girl raised her eyes, and bravely regarded him, though her face was still pale and apprehensive.

"No," she said, in a low voice. "But how can I answer you more than this—that if I am not to give myself to you I will give myself to no other? I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more."

"It is enough."

She went quickly to the front of the box; in both bouquets there were forget-me-nots. She hurriedly selected some, and returned, and gave them to him.

"Whatever happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love."

Then they followed their friends into the saloon, and sat down at a small table, though Natalie's hands were trembling so that she could scarcely undo her gloves. And George Brand said nothing; but once or twice he looked into his wife's eyes.

CHAPTER XXI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN Ferdinand Lind told Calabressa that Natalie had grown to be a woman, he no doubt meant what he said; but he himself had not the least notion what the phrase implied. He could see, of course, that she had now a woman's years, stature, self-possession; but for all that she was still to him only a child—only the dark-eyed, gentle, obedient little Natalushka, who used to be so proud when she was praised for her music, and whose only show of resolution was when she set to work on the grammar of a new language. Indeed, it is the commonest thing in the world for a son, or a daughter, or a friend to grow in years without those nearest them being aware of the fact, until some chance circumstance, some crisis, causes a revelation, and we are astounded at the change that time has insidiously made.

Such a discovery was now about to confront Ferdinand Lind. He was to learn, not only that his

daughter had left the days of her childhood behind her, but also that the womanhood to which she had attained was of a fine and firm character, a womanhood that rang true when tried. And this is how the discovery was forced on him.

On his arrival in London, Mr. Lind drove first to Lisle Street, to pick up letters on his way home. Beratinsky was in the place. Beratinsky had little news about business matters to impart; but instead he began —as Lind was looking at some of the envelopes—to drop hints about Brand. It was easy to see now, he said, why the rich Englishman was so eager to join them, and give up his life in that way. It was not for nothing. Mr. Lind would doubtless hear more at home. And so forth.

Mr. Lind was thinking of other things, but when he came to understand what these innuendoes meant, he was neither angry nor impatient. He had much toleration for human weakness; and he took it that Beratinsky was only a little off his head with jealousy. He was aware that it had been Beratinsky's ambition to become his son-in-law: a project that swiftly came to an end, through the perfect unanimity of father and daughter on that point.

"You are a fool, Beratinsky," he said, as he tied the bundle of letters together. "At your time of life you should not imagine that every one's head is full of philandering nonsense. Mr. Brand has something else to think of. Besides, he has been in the midland counties all this time."

"Has he? Who, then, was taking your daughter to dinner-parties, to theatres—I don't know what?"

Lind dealt gently with this madness.

"Who told you?"

"I have eyes, and ears."

"Put them to a better use, Beratinsky."

Then he left, and the Hansom carried him along to Curzon Street. Natalie herself flew to the door when she heard the cab drive up: there she was to receive him—smiling a welcome—and so like her mother that he was almost startled. She caught his face in her two hands, and kissed him.

"Ah, papa, why did you not let me come to meet you at Liverpool?"

"There were too many with me, Natalie. I was busy. Now get Anneli to open my portmanteau, and you can find out for yourself all the things I have brought for you."

"I do not care for them, papa; I like to have you yourself back."

"I suppose you were rather dull, Natalushka, being all by yourself?"

"Sometimes. But I will tell you all that has happened when you are having breakfast."

"I have had breakfast, child. Now I shall get through my letters, and you can tell me all that has happened afterwards."

This was equivalent to a dismissal; so Natalie went upstairs, leaving her father to go into the small study, where lay another bundle of letters for him.

Almost the first that he opened was from George Brand; and to his amazement he found, not details about progress in the north, but a simple, straightforward, respectful demand to be permitted to claim the hand of Natalie in marriage. He did not conceal the fact that this proposal had already been made to

Natalie herself; he ventured to hope that it was not distasteful to her; he would also hope that her father had no objections to urge. It was surely better that the future of a young girl in her position should be provided for. As regarded himself, Mr. Lind's acquaintance with him was no doubt but recent and comparatively slight; but if he wished any further, and natural, inquiry into the character of the man to whom he was asked to entrust his daughter, Lord Evelyn might be consulted as his closest friend. And a speedy answer was requested.

This letter was on the whole rather a calm and business-like performance. Brand could appeal to Natalie, and that earnestly and honestly enough; he felt he could not bring himself to make any such appeal to her father. Indeed, any third person reading this letter would have taken it to be more of the nature of a formal demand, or something required by the conventionalities; a request the answer to which was not of tremendous importance, seeing that the two persons most interested had already come to an understanding.

But Mr. Lind did not look at it in that light at all. He was at first surprised; then vexed and impatient, rather than angry; then determined to put an end to this nonsense at once. If he had deemed the matter more serious, he would have sat down and considered it with his customary forethought. But he was merely irritated.

"Beratinsky was not so mad as I took him to be, after all," he said to himself. "Fortunately, the affair has not gone too far."

He carried the open letter upstairs, and found

Natalie in the drawing-room, dusting some pieces of Venetian glass.

"Natalie," he said, with an abruptness that startled her—and in a tone of anger which was just a little bit affected—"Natalie, what is the meaning of this folly?"

She turned, and regarded him. He held the open letter in his hand. She said, calmly—

"I do not understand you."

This only vexed him the more.

"I ask you what you have been doing in my absence?" he said, angrily. "What have you been doing to entitle any man to write me such a letter as this? His affection! your future!—has he not something else to think of? And you—you seem not to have been quite so dull when I was away, after all! Well, it is time to have an end of it. Whatever nonsense may have been going on, I hope you have both of you come to your senses. Let me hear no more of it!"

Now she saw clearly what the letter must contain; what had stirred her father to such an unusual exhibition of wrath. She was a little pale; but not afraid. There was no tremor in her voice as she spoke.

"I am sorry, papa, you should speak to me like that. I think you forget that I am no longer a child. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; and if Mr. Brand has written to you, I am willing to share the responsibility of anything he says. You must remember, papa, that I am a woman; and that I ought to have a voice in anything that concerns my own happiness."

He looked at her, almost with wonder, as if he did not quite recognize her. Was this the gentle-natured little Natalushka, whose eyes would fill with tears if she was scolded even in fun?—this tall, self-

possessed girl, with the pale face, and the firm and even tones?

"Do you mean to tell me, Natalie, that it is with your consent Brand has written to me?" her father asked, with frowning brows.

"I did not know he would write. I expected he would."

"Perhaps," said he, with an ironical smile—"perhaps you have taken time by the forelock, and already promised to be his wife?"

The answer was given with the same proud composure.

"I have not. But I have promised, if I am not his wife, never to be the wife of any other man."

It was now that Lind began to perceive how serious this matter was. This was no school-girl to be frightened out of a passing fancy. He must appeal to the reason of a woman; and the truth is, that if he had known he had this to undertake, he would not so hastily have gone into that drawing-room, with the open letter in his hand.

"Sit down, Natalie," he said, quite gently. "I want to talk to you. I spoke hastily; I was surprised and angry. Now let us see calmly how matters stand; I dare say no great harm has been done yet."

She took a seat opposite him; there was not the least sign of any girlish breaking down, even when he spoke to her in this kind way.

"I have no doubt you acted quite rightly and prudently when I was away; and as for Mr. Brand, well, any one can see that you have grown to be a good-looking young woman, and of course he would like to have a good-looking young wife to show off among the country people and to go riding to hounds

with him. Let us see what is involved in your becoming his wife, supposing that were ever seriously to be thought of. You give up all your old sympathies and friends, your interest in the work we have on hand, and you get transferred to a Buckinghamshire country-house to take the place of the old housekeeper. If you do not hear anything of what is going on—of our struggles—of your friends all over Europe: what of that? You will have the kitchen-garden to look after, and poultry to feed; and your neighbours will talk to you at dinner about foxes and dogs and horses, and the clergyman's charities. It will be a healthy life, Natalie; perhaps you will get stout and rosy like an English matron. But your old friends—you will have forgotten them."

"Never!—never!" she said, vehemently; and despite herself her eyes filled with tears.

"Then we will take Mr. Brand. The Buckinghamshire house is open again. An Englishman's house is his castle; there is a great deal of work in superintending it, its entertainments, its dependents. Perhaps he has a pack of fox-hounds; no doubt he is a Justice of the Peace, and the terror of poachers. But in the midst of all this hunting, and giving of dinner-parties, and shooting of pheasants, do you think he has much time or thought for the future of the millions of poor wretches all over Europe who once claimed his care? Not much! That was in his days of irresponsible bachelorhood. Now he is settled down. He is a country gentleman. The world can set itself right without him. He is anxious about the price of wheat."

"Ah, how you mistake him, papa!" said she proudly.

And there was a proud light on her face too as she rose and quickly went to a small escritoire close by. A few seconds sufficed her to write a short note, which she brought back to her father.

"There," said she, "I will abide by that test. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again—never speak one word to him again."

Her father took the note and read it. It was as follows—

"*My dear friend,—I am anxious about the future, for both of us. If you will promise me, now, and at once, to give up the work you are engaged in, I will be your wife, when and where you will.—Natalie.*"

"Send it!" she said, proudly. "I am not afraid. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again."

The challenge was not accepted. He tore the note in two, and flung it into the grate.

"It is time to put an end to this folly," he said, impatiently. "I have shown you what persistence in it would bring on yourself. You would be estranged from everything and every one you have hitherto been interested in; you would have to begin a new life, for which you are not fitted; you would be the means of doing our cause an irreparable injury. Yes, I say so frankly. The withdrawal of this man Brand, which would certainly follow, sooner or later, on his marriage, would be a great blow to us. We have need of his work; we have still more need of his money. And it is you, you of all people in the world, who would be the means of taking him away from us."

"But it is not so, papa," she said, in great distress. "Surely you do not think that I am begging to be allowed to become his wife? That is for him to de-

cide; I will follow his wishes, as far as I can, as far as you will allow me, papa. But this I know, that so far from that interfering with the work he has undertaken, it would only spur him on. Should I have thought of it, otherwise? Ah, surely you know—you have said so to me yourself—he is not one to go back."

He is an Englishman; you do not understand Englishmen," her father said; and then he added, firmly, "You are not to be deterred by what may happen to yourself. Well, consider what may happen to him. I tell you, I will not have this risk run. George Brand is too valuable to us. If you or he persist in this folly, it will be necessary to provide against all contingencies by procuring his banishment."

"Banishment!" she exclaimed, with a quick and frightened look.

"That may not sound much to you," said her father, calmly, "for you have scarcely what may be called a native country. You have lived anywhere, everywhere. It is different with an Englishman, who has his birthplace, his family estate, his friends in England."

"What do you mean, papa?" said she, in a low voice. She had not been frightened by the fancy picture he had drawn of her own future; but this ominous threat about her lover seemed full of menace.

"I say that at all hazards," Lind continued, looking at her from under the bushy eyebrows, "this folly must be brought to an end. It is not expedient that a marriage between you and Mr. Brand should even be thought of. You have both got other duties, inexorable duties. It is my business to see that nothing comes in the way of their fulfilment. Do you understand?"

She sat dumb now, with a vague fear about the future of her lover; for herself she had no fear.

"Some one must be sent to Philadelphia, to remain there probably for his lifetime. Do not drive me to send George Brand."

"Papa!" It was a cry of appeal; but he paid no heed. This matter he was determined to settle at once.

"Understand, this idle notion must be dropped; otherwise George Brand goes to the States forthwith, and remains there. Fortunately, I don't suppose the matter has gone far enough to cause either of you any deep misery. This is not what one would call a madly impassioned letter."

She scarcely perceived the sneer; some great calamity had befallen her, of which she as yet scarcely knew the extent; she sat mute and bewildered—too bewildered to ask why all this thing should be.

"That may not seem much to you," he said, in the same cold, implacable way. "But banishment for life from his native country, his home, his friends, is something to an Englishman. And if we are likely to lose his work in this country, through a piece of sentimental folly, we shall take care not to lose it in America."

She rose.

"Is that all, papa?"

She seemed too stunned to say any more.

He rose also, and took her hand.

"It is better to have a clear understanding, Natalie. Some might say that I object to your marrying because you are a help to me, and your going away would leave the house empty. Perhaps you may have some kind friend put that notion into your head. But that is not the reason why I speak firmly to you, why I

show you you must dismiss this fancy of the moment —if you have entertained it as well as he—as impossible. I have larger interests at stake; I am bound to sacrifice every personal feeling to my duty. And I have shown you what would be the certain result of such a marriage: therefore, I say, such a marriage is not to be thought of. Come, now, Natalie, you claim to be a woman: be a woman! Something higher is wanted from you. What would all our friends think of you if you were to sink into a position like that—the housekeeper of a country squire?"

She said nothing; but she went away to her own room, and sat down, her face pale, her heart like lead. And all her thought was of this possible doom hanging over him if he persisted; and she guessed, knowing something of him, whether he was likely to be dissuaded by a threat.

Then, for a second or so, a wild, despairing fancy crossed her mind; and her fingers tightened; and the proud mouth grew firm. If it was through her that this penalty of banishment overtook him—why should she not do as others had done?

But no—that was impossible. She had not the courage to make such an offer. She could only sit and think; and the picture before her imagination was that of her lover sailing away from his native land. She saw the ship getting further and further away from English shores, until it disappeared altogether in a mist of rain—and tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

EVASIONS.

It was in Manchester, whither he had gone to meet the famous John Molyneux, that George Brand awoke on this dull and drizzly morning. The hotel was almost full. He had been sent to the top floor; and now the outlook from the window was dismal enough—some slated roofs, a red chimney or two, and further off the higher floors of a lofty warehouse, in which the first signs of life were becoming visible. Early as it was, there was a dull roar of traffic in the distance; occasionally there was the scream of a railway whistle.

Neither the morning nor the prospect was conducive to a cheerful view of life; and perhaps that was why, when he took in his boots and found in one of them a letter, deposited there by the chambermaid, which he at once saw was in Ferdinand Lind's handwriting, that he instantly assumed, mentally, an attitude of defiance. He did not open the letter just then. He took time to let his opposition harden. He knew there would be something or somebody to fight. It was too much to expect that everything should go smoothly. If there was such a thing as a law of compensation, that beautiful dream-like evening at the opera—the light, the colour, the softened music; the scent of white-rose; the dark, soft eyes, and the last pressure of the hand; the forget-me-nots he carried away with him—would have to be paid for somehow. And he had always distrusted Ferdinand Lind. His instinct assured him that this letter, which he had

been looking for and yet dreading, contained a distinct refusal.

His instinct was completely at fault. The letter was exceedingly kind and suave. Mr. Lind might try to arouse his daughter from this idle day-dream by sharp words and an ominous threat; he knew that it was otherwise he must deal with Mr. George Brand.

"My dear Mr. Brand," he wrote, "as you may imagine, your letter has surprised me not a little, and pleased me too; for a father naturally is proud to see his daughter thought well of; and your proposal is very flattering. Especially, I may add, as you have seen so little of Natalie. You are very kind—and bold, and unlike English nature—to take her and her family on trust, as it were; for are not your countrymen very particular as to the relatives of those they would marry with? and of Natalie's relatives and friends how many have you seen? Excuse me if I do not quite explain myself, for writing in English is not as familiar to me as to Natalie, who is quite an Englishwoman now. Very well; I think it is kind of you to think so highly of my daughter as to offer her to make her your wife, you knowing so little of her. But there you do not mistake; she is worthy to be the wife of any one. If she ever marries, I hope she will be as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

"If she ever marries:" this phrase sounded somewhat ominous; and yet, if he meant to say "No," why not say it at once? Brand hastily glanced over the letter, to find something definite; but he found that would not do. He began again, and read with deliberation. The letter had obviously been written with care.

"I have also to thank you, besides for the very flattering proposal, for your care to put this matter before me at an early time. Regarding how little Natalie and you have seen each other, it is impossible that either her or your affection can be so serious that it is not fair to look on your proposal with some views as to expediency; and at an early time one can easily control one's wishes. I can answer for my daughter that she has always acted as I thought best for her happiness; and I am sure that now, or at any time, in whatever emergency, she would far prefer to have the decision rest with me, rather than take the responsibility on herself."

When George Brand came to this passage he read it over again; and his comment was, "My good friend, don't be too sure of that. It is possible that you have lived nineteen years with your daughter to very little purpose, so far as your knowledge of her character is concerned."

"Well, then, my dear sir," the letter proceeded, "all this being in such a way, might I ask you to reflect again over your proposal; and examine it from the view of expediency? You and I are not free agents, just to please ourselves when we like. Perhaps I was wrong in my first objection to your very flattering proposal; I believed you might in marrying her withdraw from the work we are all engaged in; I feared this as a great calamity; an injury done to many to gratify the fancy of one. But Natalie, I will confess, scorned me for that doubt; and, indeed, was so foolish as to propose a little hoax, to prove to me that even if she promised to marry you as a reward she could not get

you to abandon our cause. 'No, no,' she said. 'That is not to be feared. He is not one to go back.'"

When George Brand read these words, his breath came and went a little quickly. She should not find her faith in him misplaced.

"That is very well, very satisfactory, I said to her. We cannot afford to lose you, whatever happens. To return; there are more questions of expediency. For example, how can one tell what may be demanded of one? Would it be wise for you to be hampered with a wife, when you know not where you may have to go? Again, would not the cares of a household seriously interfere with your true devotion to your labours? You are so happily placed! You are free from responsibilities: why increase them? At present Natalie is in a natural and comfortable position; she has grown accustomed to it; she is proud to know that she can be of assistance to us; her life is not an unhappy one. But consider—a young wife, separated from her husband, perhaps by the Atlantic; in a new home, with new duties; anxious, terrified with apprehensions: surely that is not the change you would wish to see?"

For a second Brand was almost frightened by this picture; and a pang of remorse flashed through his heart. But then his common sense reasserted itself. Why the Atlantic? Why should they be separated? Why should she be terrified with apprehensions?

"As regards her future," her father continued. "I am not an old man; and if anything were to happen to me, she has friends. Nor will I say to you a word about myself, or my claim on her society and help; for parents have not the right to sacrifice the happiness of their children to their own convenience; it is so

fortunate when they find, however, that there is no disposition on the part of the young to break those ties that have been formed by the companionship of many years. It is this, my dear friend and colleague, that makes me thank you for having spoken so early; that I can ask you to reconsider, and that I can advise my daughter, without the fear that I am acting in a tyrannical manner or thwarting any serious affection on her part. You will perceive I do not dictate. I ask you to think over whether it is wise for your own happiness —whether it would improve Natalie's probabilities of happiness—whether it would interfere in some measure with the work you have undertaken—if you continue to cherish this fancy, and let it grow on you. Surely it is better for a man to have but one purpose in life. Nevertheless, I am open to conviction.

"That reminds me that there is another matter on which I should like to say a few words to you when there is the chance. If there is a break in the current of your present negotiations, shall you have time to run up to London? Only this: you will, I trust, not seek to see Natalie or to write to her until we have come to an understanding. Again I thank you for having spoken to me so early, before any mischief can have been done. Think over what I have said, my dear friend; and remember above all things where your chief duty lies.

"Yours sincerely,
"FERDINAND LIND."

He read this letter over two or three times, and the more he read it the more he was impressed with the vexatious conviction that it would be an uncommonly

difficult thing to answer it. It was so reasonable, so sensible, so plausible. Then his old suspicions returned. Why was this man Lind so plausible? If he objected, why did he not say so outright! All these specious arguments: how was one to turn and twist, evading some, meeting others; and all the time taking it for granted that the happiness of two people's lives was to be dependent on such logic-chopping as could be put down on a sheet of paper?

Then he grew impatient. He would not answer the letter at all. Lind did not understand. The matter had got far ahead of this clever argumentation; he would appeal to Natalie herself; it was her "Yes" or "No" that would be final; not any contest and balancing of words. There were other words he could recall, of more importance to him. He could almost hear them now, in the trembling, low voice: "*I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more.*" And again, when she gave him the forget-me-nots: "*Whatever happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love.*" He could remember the proud, brave look; again he felt the trembling of the hand that timidly sought his for an instant; he could almost scent the white-rose again, and hear the murmur of the people in the corridor. And this was the woman, into whose eyes he had looked as if they were the eyes of his wife, who was to be taken away from him by means of a couple of sheets of note-paper all covered over with little specious suggestions.

He thrust the letter into a pocket, and hurriedly proceeded with his dressing; for he had a breakfast-appointment. Indeed, before he was ready, the porter

came up and said that a gentleman had called for him, and was waiting for him in the coffee-room.

"Ask him what he will have for breakfast; and let him go on. I shall be down presently."

When Brand did at length go down, he found that his visitor had frankly accepted this permission, and had before him a large plate of corned beef, with a goodly tankard of beer. Mr. John Molyneux, although he was a great authority among English workmen generally, and especially among the trades-unionists of the north, had little about him of the appearance of the sleek-haired demagogue as that person is usually represented to us. He was a stout, yeoman-looking man, with a frosty-red face and short silver-white whiskers; he had keen, shrewd blue eyes; and a hand that gave a firm grip. The fact is, that Molyneux had in early life been a farmer, and a well-to-do farmer. But he had got smitten with the writings of Cobbett; and he began to write too. Then he took to lecturing —on the land laws, on Robert Owenism, on the Church of England, but more especially on co-operation. Finding, however, that all this pamphleteering and lecturing was playing ducks and drakes with his farming, and being in many respects a shrewd and sensible person, he resolved on selling out of his farm and investing the proceeds in the government stock of America, the country of his deepest admiration. In the end he found that he had about £150 a year; on which he could live very comfortably; while giving up all his time and attention to his energetic propagandism. This was the person who now gave Brand a hearty greeting, and then took a long draught at the tankard of ale.

"You see, Mr. Brand," said he, looking cautiously

around, and then giving a sly wink, "I thought we might have a chat by ourselves in this corner."

Brand nodded; there was no one near them.

"Now I have been considering about what you told me; and last night I called on Professor ——, of Owen's College, ye know, and I had some further talk with him. Well, sir, it's a grand scheme—splendid; and I don't wonder you've made such progress as I hear of. And when all the lads are going in for it, what would they say if old John Molyneux kept out—eh?"

"Why, they would say he had lost some of his old pluck; that's about what they would say, isn't it?" said Brand; though the fact was that he was thinking a good deal more about the letter in his pocket.

"There was one point, though, Mr. Brand, that I did not put before either Professor —— or yourself; and it is important. The point is dibs."

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, absently; he was, in truth, recalling the various phrases and sentences in that letter of Ferdinand Lind.

"Dibs, sir—dibs," said the farmer-agitator, energetically. "You know what makes the mare to go. And you know these are not the best of times; and some of the lads will be thinking they pay enough into their own Union. That's what I want to know, Mr. Brand, before I can advise any one. You need money; how do you get it? What's the damage on joining, and after?"

Brand pulled himself together.

"Oh, money?" said he. "That need not trouble you. We exact nothing. How could we ask people to buy a pig in a poke? There's not a working-man in the country but would put us down as having in-

vented an ingenious scheme for living on other people's earnings. It is not money we want; it is men."

"Yes, yes," said Molyneux, looking rather puzzled. "But when you've got the machine, you want oil, eh? The basis of everything, sir, is dibs: what can ye do without it?"

"We want money, certainly," Brand said. "But we do not touch a farthing that is not volunteered. There are no compulsory subscriptions. We take it that the more a man sees of what we are doing, and of what has to be done, the more he will be willing to give, according to his means. And so far there has been no disappointment."

"H'm!" said Molyneux, doubtfully. "I reckon you won't get much from our chaps."

"You don't know. It is wonderful what a touch of enthusiasm will do—and emulation between the local centres. Besides, we are always having accessions of richer folk; and these are expected to make up all deficiencies."

"Ah?" said the other. "I see more daylight that way. Now you, Mr. Brand, must have been a good fat prize for them, eh?"

The shrewd inquiring glance that accompanied this remark set George Brand laughing.

"I see, Mr. Molyneux, you want to get at the 'dibs' of everything. Well, I can't enlighten you any further until you join us: you have not said whether you will or not."

"I will!" said the other, bringing his fist down on the table—though he still spoke in a loud whisper. "I'm your man! In for a penny, in for a pound!"

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, politely, "but

you are in for neither, unless you like. You may be in for a good deal of work, though. You must bring us men; and you will be let off both the penny and the pound. Now, could you run up with me to London to-night, and be admitted to-morrow, and get to know something of what we are doing?"

"Is it necessary?"

"In your case, yes. We want to make you a person of importance."

So at last Molyneux agreed; and they started for London in the evening; the big, shrewd, farmer-looking man being as pleased as a child to have certain signs and passwords confided to him. Brand made light of these things—and, in fact, they were only such as were used among the outsiders; but Molyneux was keenly interested, and already pictured himself going through Europe and holding this subtle conversation with all the unknown companions whom chance might throw in his way.

But long ere he reached London, the motion of the train had sent him to sleep; and George Brand had plenty of time to think over that letter and to guess at what possible intention might lie under its plausible phrases. He had leisure to think of other things, too. The question of money, for example—about which Molyneux had been so curious—with regard to this association, was one on which he himself was but slightly informed; the treasury department being altogether outside his sphere. He did not even know whether Lind had private means; or was enabled to live as he did by the association, for its own ends. He knew that the Society had numerous paid agents; no doubt he himself could have claimed a salary, had it

been worth his while. But the truth is that "dibs" concerned him very little. He had never been extravagant; he had always lived well within his income; and his chief satisfaction in being possessed of a liberal fortune lay in the fact that he had not to bother his head about money. There was one worry the less in life.

But then George Brand had been a good deal about the world, and had seen something of human life, and knew very well the power the possession of money gives. Why, this very indifference, this happy carelessness about pecuniary details, was but the consequence of his having a large fund in the background that he could draw on at will. If he did not overvalue his fortune, on the other hand he did not undervalue it; and he was about the last man in the world who could reasonably have been expected to part with it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TALISMAN.

NATALIE LIND was busy writing at the window of the drawing-room in Curzon Street, when Calabressa entered, unannounced. He had outstripped the little Anneli; perhaps he was afraid of being refused. He was much excited.

"Forgive me, signorina, if I startle you," he said rapidly, in his native tongue; "forgive me, little daughter. We go away to-night, I and the man Kirski, whom you saved from madness: we are ordered away; it is possible I may never see you again. Now listen."

He took a seat beside her; in his hurry and eagerness he had for the moment abandoned his airy manner.

"When I came here I expected to see you a school-

girl—some one in safe keeping; with [illegible] troubles to think of. You are a woman; you may ha[illegible]e trouble; and it is I, Calabressa, who would then cut [illegible] off my right hand to help you. I said I would leave yo[illegible]u my address; I cannot. I dare not tell any one even wh[illegible]ere I am going. What of that? Look well at this card."

He placed before her a small bit of pasteboard, with some lines marked on it.

"Now we will imagine that some day you are in great trouble; you know not what to do; and you suddenly bethink yourself, 'Now it is Calabressa and the friends of Calabressa who must help me——'"

"Pardon me, signore," said Natalie, gently. "To whom should I go but to my father, if I were in trouble? And why should one anticipate trouble? If it were to come, perhaps one might be able to brave it?"

"My little daughter, you vex me. You must listen. If no trouble comes, well! If it does, are you any the worse for knowing that there are many on whom you can rely? Very well; look! This is the Via Roma in Naples."

"I know it," said Natalie: why should she not humour the good-natured old albino, who had been a friend of her mother's?

"You go along it until you come to this little lane; it is the Vico Carlo; you ascend the lane—here is the first turning—you go round, and behold! the entrance to a court. The court is dark; but there is a lamp burning all day; go further in, there are wine-vaults. You enter the wine-vaults, and say, 'Bartolotti.' You do not say, 'Is Signor Bartolotti at home?' or, 'Can I see the illustrious Signor Bartolotti;' but 'Bartolotti,' clear and short. You understand?"

"You give yourself too much trouble, signore."

"I hope so, little daughter. I hope you will never have to search for these wine-vaults; but who knows? *Alors*, one comes to you; and says, 'What is your pleasure, signorina?' Then you ask, 'Where is Calabressa?' The answer to that? It may be, 'We do not know,' or it may be, 'Calabressa is in prison again;' or it may be, 'Calabressa is dead.' Never mind. When Calabressa dies no one will care less than Calabressa himself."

"Some one would care, signore; you have a mother."

He took her hand.

"And a daughter, too," he said lightly, "if the wicked little minx would only listen. Then you know what you must say to the man whom you will see at the wine-vaults; you must say this, 'Brother, I come with a message from Calabressa: it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands your help.' Then do you know what will happen? From the next morning you will be under the protection of the greatest power in Europe; a power unknown but invincible; a power that no one dares to disobey. Ah, little one, you will find out what the friends of Calabressa can do for you when you appeal to them!"

He smiled proudly.

"Allons! Put this card away in a secret place. Do not show it to any one; let no one know the name I confided to you. Can you remember it, little daughter?"

"Bartolotti."

"Good. Now that is one point settled; here is the next. You do not seem to have any portrait of your mother, my little one?"

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed, quickly; for she was

more interested now. "I suppose my father could not bear to be reminded of his loss: if there is any portrait, I have not seen it; and how could I ask him?"

He regarded her for a moment; and then he spoke, more slowly than hitherto—

"Little Natalushka, I told you I am going away; and who knows what may happen to me? I have no money or land to leave to any one; if I had a wife and children the only name I could leave them would be the name of a jail-bird. If I were to leave a will behind me it would read, 'My heart to my beloved Italia; my curse to Austria; and my——' Ah, yes, after all I have something to leave to the little Natalushka."

He put his hand, which trembled somewhat, into the breast of his coat, and brought out a small leather case.

"I am about to give you my greatest treasure, little one; my only treasure. I think you will value it."

He opened the case and handed it to her; inside there was a miniature, painted on ivory; it might have been a portrait of Natalie herself. For some time the girl did not say a word; but her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"She was very beautiful, signore," she murmured.

"Ah, little daughter," he said, cheerfully, "I am glad to see the portrait in safe keeping at last. Many a risk I have run with it; many a time I have had to hide it. And you must hide it too; let no one see it but yourself. But now you will give me one of your own in exchange, my little one; and so the bargain is complete."

She went to the small table adjoining to hunt among the photographs.

"And lastly, one more point, Signorina Natalushka," said Calabressa, with the air of one who had got through some difficult work. "You asked me once to find out for you who was the lady from whom you received the little silver locket. Well, you see, that is now out of my power. I am going away. If you are still curious, you must ask some one else; but is it not natural to suppose that the locket may have been stolen a great many years ago and at last the thief resolves to restore it? No matter; it is only a locket."

She returned with a few photographs for him to choose from. He picked out two.

"There is one for me; there is one for my old mother. I will say to her, 'Do you remember the young Hungarian lady who came to see you at Spezia? Put on your spectacles now, and see whether that is not the same young lady. Ah, good old mother; can you see no better than that?—that is not Natalie Berezolyi at all; that is her daughter, who lives in England. But she has not got the English way; she is not content when she herself is comfortable; she thinks of others; she has an ear for voices afar off.' That is what I shall say to the old mother."

He put the photographs in his pocket.

"In the mean time, my little daughter," said he, "now that our pressing business is over, one may speak at leisure; and what of you, now? My sight is not very good; but even my eyes can see that you are not looking cheerful enough. You are troubled, Natalushka; or you would not have forgotten to thank me for giving you the only treasure I have in the world."

The girl's pale face flushed; and she said quickly—

"There are some things that are not to be ex-

pressed in words, Signor Calabressa. I cannot tell you what I think of your kindness to me."

"Silence—silence! do you not understand my joking? *Eh bien;* let us understand each other. Your father has spoken to me—a little, not much. He would rather have an end to the love-affair, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"There are some other things that are not to be spoken of," the girl said, in a low voice, but somewhat proudly.

"Natalushka, I will not have you answer me like that. It is not right. If you knew all my history, perhaps you would understand why I ask you questions—why I interfere—why you think me impertinent——"

"Oh no, signore; how can I think that?"

She had her mother's portrait in her hand; she was gazing into the face that was so strangely like her own.

"Then why not answer me?"

She looked up with a quick, almost despairing look.

"Because I try not to think about it," she said, hurriedly. "Because I try to think only of my work. And now, Signor Calabressa, you have given me something else to think about; something to be my companion when I am alone; and from my heart I thank you!"

"But you speak as if you were in great grief, my little one. It is not all over between you and your lover?"

"How can I tell? What can I say?" she exclaimed; and for a moment her eyes looked up, with the appealing look of a child. "He does not write to me. I may not write to him. I must not see him."

"But then there may be reasons for delay and consideration, little Natalushka; your father may have reasons. And your father did not speak to me as if

it were altogether impossible. What he said was, in effect, 'We will see—we will see.' However, let us return to the important point; it is my advice to you —you cannot have forgotten it—that whatever happens, whatever you may think, do not, little one, seek to go against your father's wishes. You will promise me that?"

"I have not forgotten, signore; but do you not remember my answer? I am no longer a child. If I am to obey, I must have reasons for obeying."

"What?" said he, smiling. "And you know that one of our chief principles is that obedience is a virtue in itself?"

"I do not belong to your association, Signor Calabressa."

"The little rebel!"

"No, no, signore; do not drive me into a false position. I cannot understand my father, who has always been so kind to me; it is better not to speak of it; some day, when you come back, Signor Calabressa, you will find it all a forgotten story. Some people forget so readily; do they not?"

The trace of pathetic bitterness in her speech did not escape him.

"My child," said he, "you are suffering, I perceive it. But it may soon be over; and your joy will be all the greater. If not, if the future has trouble for you, remember what I have told you. *Allons donc!* Keep up a brave heart—but I need not say that to the child of the Berezolyis."

He rose; and at the same moment a bell was heard below.

"You are not going, Signor Calabressa? That must be my father."

"Your father!" he exclaimed; and he seemed confused. Then he added, quickly, "Ah, very well. I will see him as I go down. Our business, little one, is finished; is it not? Now repeat to me the name I mentioned to you."

"Bartolotti?"

"Excellent, excellent. And you will keep the portrait from every one's eyes but your own. Now, farewell!"

He took her two hands in his.

"My beautiful child," said he, in rather a trembling voice, "may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was—and send you more happiness. I may not see England again—no, it is not likely; but in after years you may sometimes think of old Calabressa, and remember that he loved you, almost as he once loved another of your name."

Surely she must have understood. He hurriedly kissed her on the forehead; and said, "Adieu, little daughter," and left. And when he had gone she sank into the chair again; and clasped both her hands round her mother's portrait, and burst into tears.

Calabressa made his way downstairs, and, at the foot, ran against Ferdinand Lind.

"Ah, amico mio," said he, in his gay manner. "See now, we have been bidding our adieux to the little Natalushka—the rogue!—to pretend to me she had no sweetheart! Shall we have a glass of wine, *mon capitaine*, before we embark?"

"Yes, yes," said Lind, though without any great cordiality. "Come into my little room."

He led him into the small study; and presently there was wine upon the table. Calabressa was exceedingly vivacious; and a little difficult to follow,

especially in his French. But Lind allowed him to rattle on, until by accident he referred to some meeting that was shortly to take place at Posilipo.

"Well, now, Calabressa," said Lind, with apparent carelessness, as he broke off a bit of biscuit and poured out a glass of wine for himself, "I suppose you know more about the opinions of the Council now than any one not absolutely within itself."

"I am a humble servant only, friend Lind," he remarked, as he thrust his fingers into the breast of his military-looking coat: "a humble servant of my most noble masters. But sometimes one hears—one guesses —mais à quel propos cette question, monsieur mon camarade?"

Lind regarded him; and said, slowly—

"You know, Calabressa, that some seventeen years ago I was on the point of being elected a member of the Council."

"I know it," said the other, with a little embarrassment.

"You know why—though you do not know the right or the wrong of it—all that became impossible."

Calabressa nodded. It was delicate ground, and he was afraid to speak.

"Well," said Lind, "I ask you boldly—do you not think I have done enough in these sixteen or seventeen years to reinstate myself? Who else has done a tithe of the work I have done?"

"Friend Lind, I think that is well understood at head-quarters."

"Very well, then, Calabressa, what do you think? Consider what I have done; consider what I have now to do; what I may yet do. There is this Zacca-

telli business. I do not approve of it myself. I think it is a mistake, as far as England is concerned. The English will not hear of assassination—even though it is such a criminal as the *cardinale affamatore* who is to be punished. But though I do not approve, I obey. Some one from the English section will fulfil that duty: it is something to be considered. Then money; think of the money I have contributed. Without English money what would have been done?—when there is any new levy wanted it is to England—to me—they apply first; and at the present moment their cry for money is more urgent than ever. Very well, then, my Calabressa; what do you think of all this?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Friend Lind, I am not so far into their secrets as that. Being in prison so long, one loses terms of familiarity with many of one's old associates, you perceive? But your claims are undoubted, my friend; yes, yes, undoubted."

"But what do you think, Calabressa?" he said—and that affectation of carelessness had now gone: there was an eager look in the deep-set eyes under the bushy eyebrows. "What do you yourself think of my chance? It ought to be no chance; it ought to be a certainty. It is my due. I claim it as the reward of my sixteen years' work, to say nothing of what went before."

"Ah, naturellement, sans doute, tu as raison, mon camarade," said the politic Calabressa, endeavouring to get out of the difficulty with a shrug of his shoulders. "But—but—the more one knows of the Council the more one fears prying into its secrets. No, no; I do what I am told; for the rest my ears are closed."

"If I were on the Council, Calabressa," said Lind,

slowly, "you would be treated with more consideration. You have earned as much."

"A thousand thanks, friend Lind," said the other; "but I have no more ambitions now. The time for that is past. Let them make what they can out of old Calabressa—a stick to beat a dog with; as long as I have my liberty and a cigarette, I am content."

"Ah, well," said Lind, resuming his careless air, "you must not imagine I am seriously troubled because the Council have not as yet seen fit to think of what I have done for them. I am their obedient servant, like yourself. Some day, perhaps, I may be summoned."

"A la bonne heure!" said Calabressa, rising. "No, no more wine. Your port-wine here is glorious—it is a wine for the gods; but a very little is enough for a man. So, farewell, my good friend Lind. Be kind to the beautiful Natalushka, if that other thing that I spoke of is impossible. If the bounty of Heaven had only given me such a daughter!"

"Kirski will meet you at the station," said Lind. "Charing Cross, you remember; eight sharp. The train is 8.25."

"I will be there."

They shook hands and parted; the door was shut. Then, in the street outside, Calabressa glanced up at the drawing-room windows just for a second.

"Ah, little daughter," he said to himself as he turned away, "you do not know the power of the talisman I have given you. But you will not use it. You will be happy; you will marry the Englishman; you will have little children round your knee; and you will lead so busy and glad a life, year after year, that you will never have a minute to sit down and think of old

Calabressa, or of the stupid little map of Naples he left with you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

ONCE again the same great city held these two. When George Brand looked out in the morning on the broad river, and the bridges, and the hurrying cabs and trains and steamers, he knew that this flood of dusky sunshine was falling also on the quieter ways of Hyde Park and the semi-silent thoroughfares adjoining. They were in the same city, but they were far apart. An invisible barrier separated them. It was not to Curzon Street that he directed his steps when he went out into the still, close air and the misty sunlight.

It was to Lisle Street that he walked; and all the way he was persuading himself to follow Calabressa's advice. He would betray no impatience, however specious Lind might be. He would shut down that distrust of Natalie's father that was continually springing up in his mind. He would be considerate to the difficulties of his position, ready to admit the reasonableness of his arguments, mindful of the higher duties demanded of himself. But then—but then—he bethought him of that evening at the theatre; he remembered what she had said; how she had looked. He was not going to give up his beautiful, proud-natured sweetheart as a mere matter of expediency, as the conclusion of a clever bit of argument.

When he entered Mr. Lind's room he found Heinrich Reitzei its sole occupant. Lind had not yet arrived; the pallid-faced young man with the *pince-nez*

was in possession of his chair. And no sooner had George Brand made his appearance than Reitzei rose, and, with a significant smile, motioned the new-comer to take the vacant seat he had just quitted.

"What do you mean?" Brand said, naturally taking another chair, which was much nearer him.

"Will you not soon be occupying this seat *en permanence?*" Reitzei said, with affected nonchalance.

"Lind has abdicated, then, I presume," said Brand, coldly: this young man's manner had never been very grateful to him.

Reitzei sank into the seat again, and twirled at his little black waxed moustache.

"Abdicated? No; not yet," he said, with an air of indifference. "But if one were to be translated to a higher sphere? There is a vacancy in the Council."

"Then he would have to live abroad," said Brand, quickly.

The younger man did not fail to observe this eagerness, and no doubt attributed it to a wrong cause. It was no sudden hope of succeeding to Lind's position that prompted the exclamation; it was the possibility of Natalie being carried away from England.

"He would have to live in the place called nowhere," said Reitzei, with a calm smile. "He would have to live in the dark—in the middle of the night —everywhere and nowhere at the same moment."

Brand was on the point of asking what would then become of Natalie, but he forbore. He changed the subject altogether.

"How is that mad Russian fellow getting on—Kirski? Still working?"

"Yes; at another kind of work. Calabressa has

undertaken to turn his vehemence into a proper channel —to let off the steam, as it were, in another direction."

"Calabressa?"

"Kirski has become the humble disciple of Calabressa, and has gone to Genoa with him."

"What folly is this!" Brand said. "Have you admitted that maniac?"

"Certainly; such force was not to be wasted."

"A pretty disciple! How much Russian does Calabressa know?"

"Gathorne Edwards is with them; it is some special business. Both Calabressa and Kirski will be capital linguists before it is over."

"But how has Edwards got leave again from the British Museum?"

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe Lind wants to buy him over altogether. We could pay him more than the British Museum."

At this moment there was a sound outside of some one ascending the stair, and directly afterwards Mr. Lind entered the room. As he came in, Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Mr. Brand?" Lind said, shaking his visitor's hand with great warmth. "Very glad to see you looking so well; hard work does not hurt you, clearly. I hope I have not incommoded you in asking you to run up to London?"

"Not at all," Brand said. "Molyneux came up with me last night."

"Ah! You have gained him over?"

"Quite."

"Again I congratulate you. Well, now, since we have begun upon business, let us continue upon business."

He settled himself in his chair, as if for some

serious talk. Brand could not help being struck by the brisk, vivacious, energetic look of this man; and on this morning he was even more than usually smartly dressed. Was it his daughter who had put that flower in his button-hole?

"I will speak frankly to you, and as clear as I can in my poor English. You must let me say, without flattery, that we are all very indebted to you—very proud of you; we are glad to have you with us. And now that you see further and further about our work, I trust you are not disappointed. You understand at the outset you must take so much on trust."

"I am not in the least disappointed; quite the reverse," Brand said—and he remembered Calabressa, and spoke in as friendly a way as possible. "Indeed, many a time I am sorry one cannot explain more fully to those who are only inquiring. If they could only see at once all that is going on they would have no more doubt. And it is slow work with some of them."

"Yes, certainly; no doubt. Well, to return, if you please: it is a satisfaction you are not disappointed; that you believe we are doing a good work; that you go with us. Very well. You have advanced grade by grade; you see nothing to repent of; why not take the final step?"

"I don't quite understand you," he said, doubtfully.

"I will explain. You have given yourself to us—your time, your labour, your future; but the final step of self-sacrifice—is it so very difficult? In many cases it is merely a challenge: we say, 'Show that you can trust us even for your very livelihood. Become absolutely dependent on us, even for your food, your drink, your clothes.' In your case, I admit, it is some-

thing more: it is an invitation to a ve[illegible] a proper channel self-sacrifice. All the more proof that you a[illegible]her direction."

"I do not think I am afraid," said Bra[illegible] "but——"

"One moment. The affair is simple. The o[illegible] of Cala- of our society—those who govern—those from wh[illegible]d- are chosen the members of the Council—that Counci[illegible] that is more powerful than any government in Europe —those officers, I say, are required first of all to surrender every farthing of personal property, so that they shall become absolutely dependent on the Society itself——"

Brand looked a trifle bewildered: more than that, resentful and indignant, as if his common-sense had received a shock.

"It is a necessary condition," Lind continued, without eagerness—rather as if he were merely enunciating a theory. "It ensures absolute equality; it is a proof of faith. And you may perceive that, as I am alive, they do not allow one to starve."

The slight smile that accompanied this remark was meant to be reassuring. Certainly, Mr. Lind did not starve; if the Society of which he was a member enabled him to live as he did in Curzon Street, he had little to complain of.

"You mean," said George Brand, "that before I enter this highest grade, next to the Council, I must absolutely surrender my entire fortune to you?"

"To the common fund of the Society—yes," was the reply; uttered as a matter of course.

"But there is no compulsion?"

"Certainly not. On this point every one is free. You may remain in your present grade, if you please."

serious talk. Then I confess to you I don't see why I should the brisk, vivace," Brand said, frankly. "Cannot I work as well on this mo you just as I am?" dressed. in his "Perhaps; perhaps not," said the other, easily. "But you perceive, further, that the fact of our not exacting subscriptions from the poorer members of our association makes it all the more necessary that we should have voluntary gifts from the richer. And as regards a surplus of wealth, of what use is that to any one? Am I not granted as much money as one need reasonably want? And just now there is more than ever a need of money for the general purposes of the Society: Lord Evelyn gave us a thousand pounds last week."

Brand flushed red.

"I wish you had told me," he said; "I would rather have given you five thousand. You know he cannot afford it."

"The greater the merit of the sacrifice," said his companion, calmly.

This proposal was so audacious that George Brand was still a little bewildered; but the fact was that, while listening very respectfully to Mr. Lind, he had been thinking more about Natalie; and it was the most natural thing in the world that some thought of her should now intervene.

"Another thing, Mr. Lind," said he, though he was rather embarrassed. "Even if I were to make such a sacrifice, as far as I am concerned; if I were to run the risk for myself alone, that might be all very well; but supposing that I were to marry, do you think I should like my wife to run such a risk—do you think

I should be justified in allowing her? And surely *you* ought not to ask *me*. It is your own daughter——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Brand," said the other, blandly but firmly. "We will restrict ourselves to business at the present moment, if you will be so kind. I wrote to you all that occurred to me when I had to consider your very flattering proposal with regard to my daughter; I may now add that if any thought of her interfered with your decision in this matter, I should still further regret that you had ever met."

"You do not take the view a father would naturally take about the future of his own daughter," said Brand, bluntly.

Lind was not in the least moved by this taunt.

"I should allow neither the interests of my daughter nor my own interests to interfere with my sense of duty," said he. "Do you know me so little? Do you know her so little? Ah, then you have much to learn of her!"

Lind looked at him for a second or two, and added, with a slight smile—

"If you decide to say no, be sure I will not say a word of it to her. No: I will still leave the child her hero in her imagination. For when I said to her, 'Natalie, an Englishman will do a good deal for the good of the people—he will give you his sympathy, his advice, his time, his labour—but he will not put his hand in his pocket;' then she said, 'Ah, but you do not understand Mr. Brand yet, papa; he is with us; he is not one to go back.'"

"But this abandonment of one's property is so disproportionate in different cases——"

"The greater the sacrifice, the greater the merit,"

returned the other: then he immediately added, "But do not imagine I am seeking to persuade you. I place before you the condition on which you may go forward and attain the highest rank, ultimately perhaps the greatest power, in this organization. Ah, you do not understand what that is as yet. If you knew, you would not hesitate very long, I think."

"But — but suppose I have no great ambition," Brand remonstrated. "Suppose I am quite content to go on doing what I can in my present sphere?"

"You have already sworn to do your utmost, in every direction. On this one point of money, however, the various Councils have never departed from the principle that there must be no compulsion. On any other point the Council orders; you obey. On this point the voluntary sacrifice has, as I say, all the more merit; and it is not forgotten. For what are you doing? You are yielding up a superabundance that you cannot use, so that thousands and thousands of the poor throughout the world may not be called on to contribute their pence. You are giving the final proof of your devotion. You are taking the vow of poverty and dependence, which many of the noblest brotherhoods the world has seen have exacted from their members at the very outset; but in your case with the difference that you can absolutely trust to the resources of an immense association——"

"Yes, as far as I am concerned," Brand said, quickly. "But I ask you whether I should be justified in throwing away this power to protect others. May I appeal to Natalie herself? May I ask her?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Brand," said the other, with the same mild firmness, "I must request you in the mean

time to leave Natalie out of consideration altogether. This is a question of duty, of principle; it must regulate our future relations with each other; pray let it stand by itself."

Brand sat silent for a time. There were many things to think over. He recalled, for example, though vaguely, a conversation he had once had with Lord Evelyn, in which this very question of money was discussed; and in which he had said that he would above all things make sure he was not being duped. Moreover, he had intended that his property, in the event of his dying unmarried, should go to his nephews. But it was not his sister's boys who were now uppermost in his mind.

He rose.

"You cannot expect me to give you a definite answer at once," he said, almost absently.

"No. But before you go, let me add this," said the other, regarding his companion with a watchful look. "The Council are not only in urgent need of liberal funds just now, but also, in several directions, of diligent and exceptional service. The money contribution which they demand from England I shall be able to meet somehow, no doubt; hitherto I have not failed them. The claim for service shall not find us wanting either, I hope; and it has been represented to me that perhaps you ought to be transferred to Philadelphia, where there is much to be done at the present moment."

This suggestion effectually woke Brand from his day-dream.

"Philadelphia?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the other, speaking very slowly, as if

anxious that every word should have weight. "My visit, short as it was, enabled me to see how well one might employ one's whole lifetime there—with such results as would astonish our good friends at head-quarters, I am sure of that. True, the parting from one's country might be a little painful at first; but that is not the greatest of the sacrifices that one should be prepared to submit to. However," he added, rather more lightly, "this is still to be decided on; meanwhile I hope, and I am sure you hope too, Mr. Brand, that I shall be able to satisfy the Council that the English section does not draw back when called on for its services."

"No doubt — no doubt," Brand said; but the pointed way in which his companion had spoken did not escape him, and promised to afford him still further food for reflection.

But if this was a threat, he would show no fear.

"Molyneux wishes to get back north as soon as possible," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, just as if they had been talking of commonplace affairs the whole time. "I suppose his initiation could take place to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Lind, following his visitor to the door. "And you must allow me to thank you once more, my dear Mr. Brand, for your service in securing to us such an ally. I should like to have talked with you about your experiences in the north; but you agree with me that the suggestion I have made demands your serious consideration first—is it not so?"

Brand nodded.

"I will let you know to-morrow," said he. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" said Mr. Lind, pleasantly; and then the door was shut.

He was attended downstairs by the stout old German, who, on reaching the front door, drew forth a letter from his pocket, and handed it to him with much pretence of mystery. He was thinking of other things, to tell the truth; and as he walked along he regarded the outside of the envelope with but little curiosity. It was addressed, "*All' Egregio Signore, Il Signor G. Brand.*"

"No doubt a begging letter from some Leicester Square fellow," he thought.

Presently, however, he opened the letter, and read the following message, which was also in Italian:—

"*The beautiful caged little bird sighs and weeps, because she thinks she is forgotten. A word of remembrance would be kind, if her friend is discreet and secret. Above all, no open strife. This from one who departs. Farewell!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

THIS must be said for George Brand, that while he was hard and unsympathetic in the presence of those whom he disliked or distrusted, in the society of those whom he did like and did trust he was docile and acquiescent as a child, easily led and easily persuaded. When he went from Lind's chamber, which had been to him full of an atmosphere of impatience and antagonism, to Lord Evelyn's study, and found his friend sitting reading there, his whole attitude changed. And

his first duty was to utter a series of remonstrances about the thousand pounds.

"You can't afford it, Evelyn. Why didn't you come to me? I would have given it to you a dozen times over rather than you should have paid it."

"No doubt you would," said the pale lad. "That is why I did not come to you."

"I wish you could get it back."

"I would not take it back. It is little enough I can do; why not let me give such help as I can? If only those girls would begin to marry off, I might do more. But there is such a band of them that men are afraid to come near them."

"I think it would be a pity to spoil the group," said Brand. "The country should subscribe to keep them as they are—the perfect picture of an English family. However, to return: you must promise me not to commit any of these extravagances again. If any appeal is made to you, come to me."

But here a thought seemed to strike him.

"Ah," he said, "I have something to tell you. Lind is trying to get me to enter the same grade of officership with himself. And do you know what the first qualification is?—that you give up every penny you possess in the world."

"Well?"

"Well!"

The two friends stared at each other—the one calmly inquisitive, the other astounded.

"I thought you would have burst out laughing!" Brand exclaimed.

"Why?" said the other. "You have already done more for them—for us—than that: why should you

not do all in your power? Why should you not do all that you can, and while you can? Look!"

They were standing at the window. On the other side of the street, far below them, were some funeral carriages; at this precise moment the coffin was being carried across the pavement.

"That is the end of it. I say why shouldn't you do all that you can, and while you can?"

"Do you want reasons? Well, one has occurred to me since I came into this room. A minute ago I said to you that you must not repeat that extravagance; and I said if you were appealed to again you could come to me. But what if I had already surrendered every penny in the world? I wish to retain in my own hands at least the power to help my friends."

"That is only another form of selfishness," said Lord Evelyn, laughing. "I fear you are as yet of weak faith, Brand."

He turned from the light and went and sank into the shadow of a great arm-chair.

"Now I know what you are going to do, Evelyn," said his friend. "You are going to talk me out of my common-sense. And I will not have it. I want to show you why it is impossible I should agree to this demand."

"If you feel it to be impossible, it is impossible."

"My dear fellow, is it reasonable?"

"I dislike things that are reasonable."

"There is but one way of getting at you. Have you thought of Natalie?"

"Ah!" said the other, quickly raising himself into an expectant attitude.

"You will listen now, I suppose, to reason, to com-

mon-sense. Do you think it likely that, with the possibility of her becoming my wife, I am going to throw away this certainty and leave her to all the chances of the world? Lind says that the Society amply provides for its officers. Very well; that is quite probable. I tell him that I am not afraid for myself; if I had to think of myself alone, there is no saying what I might not do, even if I were to laugh at myself for doing it. But how about Natalie? Lind might die. I might be sent away to the ends of the earth. Do you think I am going to leave her at the mercy of a lot of people whom she never saw!"

Lord Evelyn was silent.

"Besides, there is more than that," his friend continued, warmly. "You may call it selfishness, if you like, but if you love a woman and she gives her life into your hands—well, she has the first claim on you. I will put it to you: do you think I am going to sell the Beeches—when—when she might live there?"

Lord Evelyn did not answer.

"Of course I am willing to subscribe largely," his friend continued; "and Natalie herself would say yes to that. But I am not ambitious. I don't want to enter that grade. I don't want to sit in Lind's chair, when he gets elected to the Council, as has been suggested to me. I am not qualified for it; I don't care about it; I can best do my own work in my own way."

At last Lord Evelyn spoke; but it was in a meditative fashion; and not very much to the point. He lay back in his easy-chair, his hands clasped behind his head and talked; and his talk was not at all about the selling of Hill Beeches in Buckinghamshire, but of much more abstract matters. He spoke of the divine

wrath of the reformer—what a curious thing it was, that fiery impatience with what was wrong in the world; how it cropped up here and there from time to time; and how one abuse after another had been burned up by it and swept away for ever. Give the man possessed of this holy rage all the beauty and wealth and ease in the world, and he is not satisfied; there is something within him that vibrates to the call of humanity without; others can pass by what does not affect themselves with a laugh or a shrug of indifference; he only must stay and labour till the wrong thing is put right. And how often had he been jeered at by the vulgar of his time; how Common-Sense had pointed the finger of scorn at him; how Respectability had called him crazed! John Brown at Harper's Ferry is only a ridiculous old fool; his effort is absurd; even gentlemen in the North feel an "intellectual satisfaction" that he is hanged, because of his "preposterous miscalculation of possibilities." Yes; no doubt; you hang him, and there is an end; but "his soul goes marching on;" and the slaves are freed! You want to abolish the Corn Laws?—all good society shrieks at you at first; you are a Radical, a regicide, a Judas Iscariot; but in time the nation listens; and the poor have cheap bread. "Mazzini is mad!" the world cries: "why this useless bloodshed? It is only political murder." Mazzini is mad, no doubt; but in time the beautiful dream of Italy—of "Italia, the world's wonder, the world's care"—comes true. And what matter to the reformer, the agitator, the dreamer, though you stone him to death, or throw him to the lions, or clap him into a nineteenth-century prison and shut his mouth that way? He has handed on the

sacred fire. Others will bear the torch; and he who is unencumbered will outstrip his fellows. The wrong must be put right.

And so forth; and so forth. Brand sat and listened; recognizing here and there a proud, pathetic phrase of Natalie's, and knowing well whence the inspiration came; and as he listened he almost felt as though that beautiful old place in Buckinghamshire was slipping through his fingers. The sacrifice seemed to be becoming less and less of a sacrifice; it took more and more the form of a duty: would Natalie's eyes smile approval?

Brand jumped up; and took a rapid turn or two up and down the room.

"I won't listen to you, Evelyn. You don't know anything about money matters. You care for nothing but ideas. Now, I come of a commercial stock; and I want to know what guarantee I have that this money, if I were to give it up, would be properly applied. Lind's assurances are all very well——"

"Oh yes, of course; you have got back to Lind," said Lord Evelyn, waking up from his reveries. "Do you know, my dear fellow, that your distrust of Lind is rapidly developing into a sharp and profound hatred?"

"I take men as I find them. Perhaps you can explain to me how Lind should care so little for the future of his daughter as to propose—with the possibility of our marrying—that she should be left penniless?"

"I can explain it to myself; but not to you; you are too thorough an Englishman."

"Are you a foreigner?"

"I try to understand those who are not English.

Now, an Englishman's theory is that he himself, and his wife, and children—his domestic circle, in fact—are the centre of creation; and that the fate of empires, as he finds that going one way or the other in the telegrams of the morning paper, is a very small matter compared with the necessity of Tom's going to Eton, or Dick's marrying and settling down as the bailiff of the Worcestershire farm. That is all very well; but other people may be of a different habit of mind. Lind's heart and soul are in his present work; he would sacrifice himself, his daughter, you, or anybody else, to it, and consider himself amply justified. He does not care about money, or horses, or the luxury of a big establishment; I suppose he has had to live on simple fare many a time whether he liked it or not; and can put up with whatever happens. If you imagine that you may be cheated by a portion of your money—supposing you were to adopt his proposal—going into his pocket as commission you do him a wrong."

"No, I don't think that," Brand said, rather unwillingly. "I don't take him to be a common and vulgar swindler. And I can very well believe that he does not care very much for money or luxury or that kind of thing so far as he himself is concerned. Still you would think that the ordinary instinct of a father would prevent his doing an injury to the future of his daughter——"

"Would he consider it an injury? Would she?"

"Well," Brand said, "she is very enthusiastic, and noble, and generous; and does not know what dependence or poverty means. But he is a man of the world; and you would think he would look after his own kith and kin."

"Yes, that is a wholesome conservative English sentiment; but it does not rule the actions of everybody."

"But common-sense——"

"Oh, bother common-sense! Common-sense is only a grocer, that hasn't got an idea beyond ham and eggs."

"Well, if I am only a grocer," Brand said, quite submissively. "Don't you think the grocer, if he were asked to pay off the National Debt, ought to say, 'Gentlemen, that is a praiseworthy object. But in the mean time wouldn't it be advisable for me to make sure that my wife mayn't have to go on the parish?'"

Thereafter there was silence for a time; and when Brand next spoke it was in a certain precise, hard fashion, as if he wished to make his meaning very clear.

"Suppose, Evelyn," he said, "I were to tell you what has occurred to me as the probable explanation of Lind's indifference about the future of his daughter: would you be surprised?"

"I expect it will be wrong; for you cannot do justice to that man. But I should like to hear it."

"I must tell you he wrote me a letter, a shilly-shallying sort of letter, filled with arguments to prove that a marriage between Natalie and myself would not be expedient, and all the rest of it. Not absolutely refusing his consent, you understand; but postponing the matter; and hoping that on further reflection—etcetera, etcetera. Well, do you know what my conclusion is?—that he is definitely resolved I shall not marry his daughter; and that he is playing with me, humbugging me with the possibility of marrying her,

until he induces me to hand him over my fortune for the use of the Society. Stare away as you like; that is what I believe to be true."

He rose and walked to the window, and looked out.

"Well, Evelyn, whatever happens, I have to thank you for many things. It has been all like my boyhood come back again; but much more wonderful and beautiful. If I have to go to America, I shall take with me at least the memory of one night at Covent Garden. She was there—and Madame Potecki—and old Calabressa. It was *Fidelio* they were playing. She gave me some forget-me-nots."

"What do you mean by going to America?" Lord Evelyn said.

Brand remained at the window for a minute or two, silent; and then he returned to his chair.

"You will say I am unjust again. But unless I am incapable of understanding English—such English as he speaks—this is his ultimatum: that unless I give my property, every cent of it, over to the Society, I am to go to America. It is a distinct and positive threat."

"How can you say so!" the other remonstrated. "He has just been to America himself, without any compulsion whatever."

"He has been to America for a certain number of weeks. I am to go for life—and, as he imagines, alone."

His face had been growing darker and darker; the brows lowering ominously over the eyes.

"Now, Brand," his friend said, "you are letting your distrust of this man Lind become a madness. What if he were to say to-morrow that you might marry Natalie the day after?"

The other looked up, almost bewildered.

"I would say he was serving some purpose of his own. But he will not say that. He means to keep his daughter to himself; and he means to have my money."

"Why, you admitted a minute ago that even you could not suspect him of that!"

"Not for himself. No. Probably he does not care for money. But he cares for ambition—for power; and there is a vacancy in the Council. Don't you see? This would be a tremendous large sum in the eyes of a lot of foreigners: they would be grateful, would they not? And Natalie once transferred to Italy, I could console myself with the honour and dignity of Lind's chair in Lisle Street: don't you perceive?"

"I perceive this—that you misjudge Lind altogether. I am sure of it. I have seen it from the beginning—from the moment you set your foot in his house. And you tried to blind yourself to the fact because of Natalie. Now that you imagine he means to take Natalie from you, all your pent-up antagonism breaks loose. Meanwhile, what does Natalie herself say?"

"What does she say?" he repeated, mechanically. He also was lying back in his chair; his eyes gazing aimlessly at the window. But whenever any one spoke of Natalie, or whenever he himself had to speak of her, a quite new expression came into his face. The brows lifted; the eyes were gentle. "What does she say? Why, nothing. Lind requested me neither to see her nor to write to her; and I thought that reasonable until I should have heard what he had to say to me. There is a message I got half an hour ago—not from her."

He handed to Lord Evelyn the anonymous scroll that he had received from the old German.

"Poor old Calabressa!" he said. "Those Italians are always very fond of little mysteries. But how he must have loved that woman!"

"Natalie's mother?"

"Yes," said the other, absently. "I wonder he has never gone to see his sweetheart of former years."

"What do you mean?"

Brand started. It was not necessary that Lord Evelyn should in the mean time be entrusted with that secret.

"He told me that when he saw Natalie it was to him like a vision from the dead; she was so like her mother. But I must be off, Evelyn; I have to meet Molyneux at two. So that is your advice," he said, as he went to the door—"that I should comply with Lind's demand; or—to put it another way—succumb to his threat?"

"It is not my advice at all. Quite the contrary. I say, if you have any doubt or distrust—if you cannot make the sacrifice without perfect faith and satisfaction to yourself—do not think of it."

"And go to America?"

"I cannot believe that any such compulsory alternative exists. But about Natalie: surely you will send her a message: Lind cannot object to that?"

"I will send her no message; I will go to her," the other said, firmly. "I believe Lind wishes me not to see her. Within the duties demanded of me by the Society, his wishes are to me commands; elsewhere and otherwise neither his wishes nor his commands do I value more than a lucifer-match. Is that plain enough, Evelyn?"

And so he went away, forgetting all the sage counsel Calabressa had given him; thinking rather of the kindly, thoughtful, mysterious little message the old man had left behind him, and of the beautiful caged bird that sighed and wept because she thought she was forgotten. She should not think that long!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PROMISE.

THIS was a dark time indeed for Natalie Lind—left entirely by herself, ignorant of what was happening around her, and haunted by vague alarms. But the girl was too proud to show to any one how much she suffered. On the contrary, she reasoned and remonstrated with herself; and forced herself to assume an attitude of something more than resignation, of resolution. If it was necessary that her father should be obeyed; that her lover should maintain this cruel silence; even that he and she should have the wide Atlantic separate them for ever, she would not repine. It was not for her, who had so often appealed to others, to shrink from sacrifice herself. And if this strange new hope that had filled her heart for a time had to be finally abandoned, what of that? What mattered a single life? She had the larger hope; there was another and greater future for her to think about; and she could cherish the thought that she at least had done nothing to imperil or diminish the work to which so many of her friends had given their lives.

But silence is hard to bear. Ever since the scene with her father, a certain undeclared estrangement had prevailed between these two; and no reference what-

soever had been made to George Brand. Her lover had sent her no message; no word of encouragement, of assurance, or sympathy. Even Calabressa had gone. There remained to her only the portrait that Calabressa had given her; and in the solitude of her own room many a time she sat and gazed at the beautiful face with some dim, wondering belief that she was looking at her other self, and that she could read into the features some portion of her own experiences, her own joys and sorrows. For surely those soft, dark, liquid eyes must have loved and been beloved? And had they too filled with gladness when a certain step had been heard coming near; and had they looked up with trust and pride and tenderness; and filled with tears again in absence, when only the memory of loving words remained? She recalled many a time what Calabressa had said to her—"My child, may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was; and send you more happiness." Her mother, then, had not been happy? But she was brave, Calabressa had said: when she loved a man, would she not show herself worthy of her love?

This was all very well; but in spite of her reasoning and her forced courage, and her self-possession in the presence of others, Natalie had got into the habit of crying in the quietude of her own room, to the great distress of the little Anneli who had surprised her once or twice. And the rosy-cheeked German maid guessed pretty accurately what had happened; and wondered very much at the conduct of English lovers, who allowed their sweethearts to pine and fret in solitude without sending them letters or coming to see them. But on this particular afternoon Anneli opened the door in

answer to a summons; and found outside a club commissionaire whom she had seen once or twice before; and when he gave her a letter—addressed in a handwriting which she recognized—and asked for an answer—she was as much agitated as if it had come from her own sweetheart in Görlitz. She snatched it from the man, as if she feared he would take it back. She flew with it upstairs, breathless. She forgot to knock at the door.

"Oh, Fräulein, it is a letter," said she, in great excitement, "and there is to be an answer——"

Then she hesitated. But the good sense of the child told her she ought to go.

"I will wait outside, Fräulein. Will you ring when you have written the answer?"

When Natalie opened the letter she was outwardly quite calm—a little pale, perhaps: but as she read it, her heart beat fast. And it was her heart that instantly dictated the answer to this brief and simple appeal—

"My Natalie,

"It is your father's wish that I should not see you. Is it your wish also? There is something I would like to say to you."

It was her heart that answered. She rose directly. She never thought twice, or even once, about any wish, or menace, or possible consequence. She went straight to her desk, and with a shaking hand wrote these lines—

"My Own,

"Come to me, now, at any time—when you please. Am I not yours? "Natalie."

Despite herself, she had to pause, to steady her hand—and because her heart was beating so fast that she felt choked—before she could properly address the envelope. Then she carried the letter to Anneli, who she knew was waiting outside. That done, she shut herself in again, to give herself time to think, though in truth she could scarcely think at all. For all sorts of emotions were struggling for the mastery of her—joy and a proud resolve distinctly predominant. It was done; and she would abide by it. She was not given to fear.

But she tried hard to think. At last her lover was coming to her; he would ask her what she was prepared to do: what would she answer?

Then again the joy of the thought that she was about to see him drove every other consideration out of her mind. How soon might he be here? Hurriedly she went to a jar of flowers on the table; chose some scarlet geraniums; and turned to a mirror. Her haste did not avail much; for her fingers were still trembling. But that was the colour he had said on one occasion suited her best. She had not been wearing flowers in her hair of late.

From time to time, for a second or so, some thought of her father intervened. But then her father had only enjoined her to dismiss for ever the hope of her marrying the man to whom she had given her heart and her life: that could not prevent her loving him, and seeing him, and telling him that her love was his. She wished the geraniums were less rose-red and more scarlet in hue. It was the scarlet he had approved of—that evening that he and she and the little Polish lady had dined together.

She had not long to wait. With a quick, intense consciousness she heard the Hansom drive up, and the rapid knock that followed; her heart throbbed through the seconds of silence; then she knew that he was ascending the stair; then it seemed to her as if the life would go out of her altogether. But when he flung the door open and came towards her; when he caught her two hands in his—one hand in each hand—and held them tight; when, in a silence that neither cared to break, he gazed into her rapidly moistening eyes, then the full tide of joy and courage returned to her heart; and she was proud that she had sent him that answer. For some seconds—to be remembered during a lifetime—they regarded each other in silence; then he released her hands, and began to put back the hair from her forehead as if he would see more clearly into the troubled deeps of her eyes; and then, somehow—perhaps to hide her crying—she buried her face in his breast, and his arms were around her, and she was sobbing out all the story of her waiting and her despair.

"What!" said he, cheerfully, to calm and reassure her, "the brave Natalie, to be frightened like that!"

"I was alone," she murmured. "I had no one to speak to; and I could not understand. Oh, my love, my love, you do not know what you are to me!"

He kissed her; her cheeks were wet.

"Natalie," said he, in a low voice, "don't forget this: we may be separated—that is possible—I don't know. But if we live fifty years apart from each other—if you never hear one word more from me or of me—be sure of this, that I am thinking of you, always, and loving you, as I do at this moment when my arms

are around you. Will you remember that: will you believe that—always?"

"I could not think otherwise," she answered. "But now that you are with me—that I can hear you speak to me——" And at this point her voice failed her altogether; and he could only draw her closer to him, and soothe and caress her, and stroke the raven-black hair, that had never before thrilled his fingers with its soft, strange touch.

"Perhaps," she said at last, in a broken and hesitating voice, "you will blame me for having said what I have said. I have had no girl-companions; scarcely any woman to tell me what I should do and say. But —but—I thought you were going to America—I thought I should never see you again—I was lonely and miserable—and when I saw you again—how could I help saying I was glad? How could I help saying that, and more?—for I never knew it till now: oh, my love, do you know that you have become the whole world to me? When you are away from me, I would rather die than live."

"Natalie, my life!"

"I must say that to you—once—that you may understand—if we should never see each other again. And now——"

She gently released herself from his embrace; and went and sat down by the table. He took a chair near her, and held her hand. She would not look up; for her eyes were still wet with tears.

"And now," she said, making a great effort to regain her self-control, "you must tell me about yourself. A woman may have her feelings and fancies; and cry over them when she is afraid or alone; that is nothing; it is

the way of the world. It is a man's fate that is of importance."

"You must not talk like that, Natalie," said he, gravely. "Our fate is one. Without you, I don't value my life more than this bit of geranium-leaf; with you, life would be worth having."

"And you must not talk like that either," she said. "Your life is valuable to others. Ah, my dear friend, that is what I have been trying to console myself with of late. I said, 'Well, if he goes away and does not see me again, will he not be freer? He has a great work to do; he may have to go away from England for many years; why should he be encumbered with a wife?'"

"It was your father, I presume, who made those suggestions to you?" said Brand, regarding her.

"Yes; papa said something like that," she answered, quite innocently. "That is what would naturally occur to him; his work has always the first place in his thoughts. And with you, too; is it not so?"

"No."

She looked up quickly.

"I will be quite frank with you, Natalie. You have the first place in my thoughts; I hope you ever will have, while I am a living man. But cannot I give the Society all the work that is in me equally well, whether I love you or whether I don't, whether you become my wife or whether you do not? I have no doubt your father has been talking to you as he has been talking to me."

She placed her disengaged hand on the top of his, and said gently—

"My father perhaps does not quite understand you; perhaps he is too anxious. I, for one, am not anxious

—about *that*. Do you know how I trust you, my dearest of friends? Sometimes I have said to myself, 'I will ask him for a pledge. I will say to him that he must promise, that he must swear to me, that whatever happens as between him and me, nothing, nothing, nothing in all the world will induce him to give up what he has undertaken;' but then again I have said to myself, 'No, I can trust him for that.'"

"I think you may, Natalie," said he, rather absently. "And yet what could have led me to join such a movement but your own noble spirit—the glamour of your voice—the thanks of your eyes? You put madness into my blood with your singing."

"Do you call it madness?" she said, with a faint flush in the pale olive face. "Is it not rather kindness—is it not justice to others—the desire to help—something that the angels in heaven must feel when they look down and see what a great misery there is in the world?"

"I think you are an angel yourself, Natalie," said he, quite simply, "and that you have come down and got among a lot of people who don't treat you too well. However, we must come to the present moment. You spoke of America: now, what do you know about that?"

The abrupt question startled her. She had been so overjoyed to see him—her whole soul was so buoyant and radiant with happiness—that she had quite forgotten or dismissed the vague fears that had been of late besetting her. But she proceeded to tell him, with a little hesitation here and there, and with a considerable smoothing down of phrases, what her father had said to her. She tried to make it appear quite rea-

sonable. And all she prayed for was that, if he were sent away to America, if they had to part for many years, or for ever, she should be permitted to say good-bye to him.

"We are not parted yet," said Brand, briefly.

The fact was he had just got a new key to the situation. So that threat about America could serve a double purpose? He was now more than ever convinced that Ferdinand Lind was merely playing off and on with him until this money question should be settled; and that he had been resolved all the time that his daughter should not marry. He was beginning to understand.

"Natalie," said he, slowly, "I told you I had something to say to you. You know your father wrote to me in the North, asking me neither to see you nor to write to you until some matter between him and me was settled. Well, I respected his wish until I should know what the thing was. Now that I do know, it seems to me that you are as much concerned as any one; and that it is not reasonable, it is not possible, I should refrain from seeing you and consulting you."

"No one shall prevent your seeing me, when it is your wish," said the girl, in a low voice.

"This, then, is the point: you know enough about the Society to understand; and there is no particular secret. Your father wishes me to enter the higher grade of officers, under the Council; and the first condition is that one surrenders up every farthing of one's property."

"Yes?"

He stared at her. Her "Yes?"—with its affectionate interest, and its absolute absence of surprise—was almost the exact equivalent of Lord Evelyn's "Well?"

"Perhaps you would advise me to consent?" he said, almost in the way of a challenge.

"Ah, no," she said, with a smile. "It is not for me to advise on such things. What you decide for yourself, that will be right."

"But you don't understand, my darling. Supposing I were ambitious of getting higher office, which I am not; supposing I were myself willing to sell my property to swell the funds of the Society—and I don't think I should be willing in any case; do you think I would part with what ought to belong to my wife—to you, Natalie? Do you think I would have you marry a beggar—one dependent on the indulgence of people unknown to him?"

And now there was a look of real alarm on the girl's face.

"Ah!" she said, quickly. "Is not that what my father feared? You are thinking of me when you should think of others. Already I—I—interfere with your duty—I tempt you——"

"My darling, be calm, be reasonable. There is no duty in the matter; your father acknowledges that himself. It is a proposal I am free to accept or reject, as I please; and now I promise you that, as you won't give me any advice, I shall decide without thinking of you at all. Will that satisfy you?"

She remained silent for a second or two; and then she said, thoughtfully—

"Perhaps you could decide just as if there were no possibility of my ever being your wife?"

"To please you, I will assume that, too."

Then she said, after a bit—

"One word more, dearest; you must grant me this

—that I may always be able to think of it when I am alone and far from you; and be able to reassure myself. It is the promise I thought I could do so well without. Now you will give it me?"

"What promise?"

"That whatever happens to you or to me, whatever my father demands of me, and wherever you may have to go, you will never withdraw from what you have undertaken?"

He met the earnest pleading look of those beautiful eyes without flinching. His heart was light enough so far as such a promise was concerned. Heavier oaths than that lay on him.

"That is simple enough, Natalie," said he. "I promise you distinctly that nothing shall cause me to swerve from my allegiance to the Society; I will give absolute and implicit obedience; and the best of such work as I can do. But they must not ask me to forget my Natalie."

She rose—still holding his hand—and stood by him, so that he could not quite see her face. Then she said, in a very low voice indeed—

"Dearest, may I give you a ring?—you do not wear one at all——"

"But surely, Natalie, it is for me to choose a ring for you?"

"Ah, it is not that I mean," she said, quickly; and with her face flushing. "It is a ring that will remind you of the promise you have given me to-day—when we may not be able to see each other."

CHAPTER XXVII.

KIRSKI.

To this pale student from the Reading Room of the British Museum, as he stands on a bridge crossing one of the smaller canals, surely the scene around him must seem one fitted to gladden the heart. For it is Venice at mid-day, in glowing sunlight: the warm cream-white fronts of the marble palaces and case-mented houses, the tall campanili with their golden tips, the vast and glittering domes of the churches, all rising fair and dream-like into the intense dark blue of a cloudless sky. How the hot sunlight brings out all the beautiful colour of the place—the richly laden fruit-stalls in the Riva dei Schiavoni; the russet and saffron sails of the vessels; the canal-boats coming in to the steps with huge open tuns of purple wine to be ladled out with copper buckets; and then all around the shining twinkling plain of the green-hued sea, catching here and there a reflection from the softly red walls of San Giorgio and the steel-grey gleaming domes of Santa Maria della Salute.

Then the passers-by: these are not like the dusky ghosts that wander through the pale-blue mists of Bloomsbury. Here comes a buxom water-carrier, in her orange petticoat and sage-green shawl, who has the two copper cans at the end of the long piece of wood poised on her shoulders pretty nearly filled to the brim. Then a couple of the gayer gondoliers in white and blue, with fancy waist-belts, and rings in their ears. A procession of black-garbed monks wends slowly along; they have come from the silence of the Armenian convent over there at the horizon. Some

wandering minstrels shoot their gondola into the mouth of the canal; and strike up a gay waltz; while they watch the shaded balconies above. Here is a lascar ashore from the big steamer that is to start for Alexandria on the morrow. A company of soldiers, with blue coats, canvas trousers, and white gaiters, half march and half trot along to the quick crackling music of the buglers. A swarthy-visaged maiden, with the calm brow of a Madonna, appears in the twilight of a balcony, with a packet of maize in her hand, and in a minute or two she is surrounded with a cloud of pigeons. Then this beggar—a child of eight or ten—red-haired and blue-eyed: surely she has stepped out of one of Titian's pictures? She whines and whimpers her prayer to him; but there is something in her look that he has seen elsewhere. It belongs to another century.

From these reveries Mr. Gathorne Edwards was aroused by some one tapping him on the shoulder. It was Calabressa.

"My dear Monsieur Edouarts," said he, in a low voice—for the red-haired little beggar was still standing there expectant—"he has gone over to the shipping-place. We must follow later on. Meanwhile, regard this letter that has just been forwarded to me. Ah, you English do not forget your promises."

Edwards threw a piece of money to the child, who passed on. Then he took the letter; and read it. It was in French.

"DEAR CALABRESSA,

"I want you to tell me what you have done with Yakov Kirski. They seem unwilling to say here; and I do not choose to inquire further. But I undertook

to look after him; and I understood he was getting on very well; and now you have carried him off. I hope it is with no intention of allowing him to go back to Russia, where he will simply make an attempt at murder, and fall into the hands of the police. Do not let the poor devil go and make a fool of himself. If you want money to send him back to England, show this letter or forward it to Messrs. ——, who will give you what you want. "Your friend,

"GEORGE BRAND.

"P.S.—I have seen your beautiful caged little bird. I can say no more at present; but that she shall not suffer through any neglect of mine."

"What is that about the caged bird?" said Edwards.

"Ah, the caged bird?" said Calabressa. "The caged bird?—do you see, that is a metaphor. It is nothing; one makes one's little joke. But I was saying, my dear friend, that you English do not promise, and then forget. No; he says, 'I will befriend this poor devil of a Kirski;' and here he comes enquiring after him. Now I must answer the letter; you will accompany me, Monsieur Edouarts? Ten minutes in my little room; and it is done."

So the two walked away together. This Edwards who now accompanied Calabressa was a man of about thirty, who looked younger; tall, fair, with a slight stoop, a large forehead, and blue eyes that stared near-sightedly through spectacles. The ordinary expression of his face was grave even to melancholy; but his occasional smile was humorous; and when he laughed the laugh was soft and light like that of a child. His knowledge of modern languages was considered to be almost unrivalled; though he had travelled but little.

When, in this little room, Calabressa had at length finished his letter, and dusted it over with sand, he was not at all loth to show it to this master of modern speech. Calabressa was proud of his French; and if he would himself have acknowledged that it was perhaps here and there of doubtful idiom and of phonetic spelling, would he not have claimed for it that it was fluent, incisive, and ornate?

"My valued friend, it is not permitted me to answer your questions in precise terms; but he to whom you have had the goodness to extend your bountiful protection is well and safe, and under my own care. No; he goes not back to Russia. His thoughts are different; his madness travels in other directions; it is no longer revenge, it is adoration and gratitude that his heart holds. And you, can you not guess who has worked the miracle? Think of this: you have a poor wretch who is distracted by injuries and suffering; he goes away alone into Europe; he is buffeted about with the winds of hunger and thirst and cold; he cannot speak; he is like a dog—a wild beast that people drive away from their door. And all at once some one addresses him in gentle tones: it is the voice of an angel to him! You plough and harrow the poor wretch's heart with suffering and contempt and hopelessness; until it is a desert, a wilderness; but some one, by accident one day, drops a seed of kindness into it, and behold! the beautiful flower of love springing up, and all the man's life going into it! Can you understand—you who ought to understand? Were you not present, when the bewildered, starved, hunted creature heard that gentle voice of pity, like an angel speaking from heaven? And if the beautiful girl, who will be the idol of my thoughts

through my remaining years, if she does not know that she has rescued a human soul from despair, you will tell her—tell her from me, from Calabressa. What would not Kirski do for her, you might well ask. The patient regards the physician who has cured him with gratitude: this is more than gratitude; it is worship. What she has preserved she owns; he would give his life to her, to you, to any one whom she regards with affection. For myself I do not say such things; but she may count on me also, while one has yet life.

"I am yours, and hers,

"CALABRESSA."

The letter was handed to Gathorne Edwards, with a proud air; and he read it, and handed it back.

"This man Kirski is not so much of a savage as you imagine," he said. "He learns quickly; and forgets nothing. He can repeat all the articles of membership; but it is No. 5 that he is particularly fond of. You have not heard him go over it, Calabressa?"

"I? No. He does not waste my time that way."

"His pronunciation," continued the younger man, with a smile, "is rather like the cracking of dry twigs. '*Article* 5. *Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend who of his own full and free consent acts as substitute; the original offender becoming thereby redeemed; acquitted, and released.*' And then he invariably adds: 'Why not make me of some use? To myself my life is nothing.'"

At this moment there was a tapping at the door.

"It is himself," said Edwards.

"Enter!" Calabressa called out.

The man who now came into the room was a very different-looking person from the wild unkempt creature who had confronted Natalie Lind in Curzon Street. The voluminous red beard and moustache had been cropped; he wore the clothes of a decent workman, with a foreign touch here and there; he was submissive and docile in look.

"Well, where have you been, my friend?" Calabressa said to him, in Italian.

Kirski glanced at Gathorne Edwards; and begun to speak to him in Russian.

"Will you explain for me, little father? I have been to many churches."

"The police will not suspect him if he goes there," said Calabressa, laughing.

"And to the shops in the Piazza San Marco where the pictures are of the saints."

"Well?"

"Little father, I can find no one of the saints so beautiful as that one in England that the master Calabressa knows."

Calabressa laughed again.

"Allons, mon grand enfant! Tell him that if it is only a likeness he is hunting for, I can show him one."

With that he took out from his breast-pocket a small pocket-book; opened it; found a certain photograph; and put it on the table — shoving it over towards Kirski. The dim-eyed Russian did not dare to touch it; but he stooped over it; and he put one trembling hand on each side of it, as if he would

concentrate the light; and gazed at this portrait of Natalie Lind until he could see nothing at all for the tears that came into his eyes. Then he rose abruptly; and said something rapidly to Edwards.

"He says, 'Take it away, or you will make me a thief. It is worth more than all the diamonds in the world.'"

Calabressa did not laugh this time. He regarded the man with a look in which there was quite as much pity as curiosity.

"The poor devil!" he said. "Tell him I will ask the beautiful saint whom he worships so to send him a portrait of herself with her own hands. I will. She will do as much as that for her friend Calabressa."

This had scarcely been translated to Kirski when in his sudden gratitude he caught Calabressa's hand and kissed it.

"Tell him, also," Calabressa said good-naturedly, "that if he is hungry before dinner-time there is sausage and bread and beer in the cupboard. But he must not stir out till we come back. Allons, mon bon camarade!"

Calabressa lit another cigarette, and the two companions sallied forth. They stepped into a gondola; and presently they were being borne swiftly over the plain of light green water. By-and-by they plunged into a varied and picturesque mass of shipping, and touched land again in front of a series of stores. The gondola was ordered to await their return.

Calabressa passed without question through the lower floor of this particular building, where the people were busy with barrels of flour; and led the

way upstairs until he stopped at a certain door. He knocked thrice, and entered. There was a small, dark man seated at a table, apparently engaged with some bills of lading.

"You are punctual, Brother Calabressa."

"Your time is valuable, Brother Granaglia. Let me present to you my comrade, Signor Edouarts, of whom I wrote to you."

The sallow-faced little man with the tired look bowed courteously; begged his guests to be seated; and pushed towards them a box of cigarettes.

"Now, my Calabressa," said he, "to the point. As you guess, I am pressed for time. Seven days hence will find me in Moscow."

"In Moscow!" exclaimed Calabressa. "You dare not!"

Granaglia waved his hand a couple of inches.

"Do not protest. It may be your turn to-morrow. And my good friend Calabressa would find Moscow just about as dangerous for him as for me."

"Monsieur le Secrétaire, I have no wish to try. But to the point, as you say. May one ask how it stands with Zaccatelli?"

Granaglia glanced at the Englishman.

"Of course he knows everything," Calabressa explained instantly. "How otherwise should I have brought him with me?"

"Well, Zaccatelli has received his warning."

"Who carried it?"

"I."

"You? You are the devil! You thrust your head into the lion's den?"

The black-eyed, worn-faced little man seemed

pleased. An odd dry smile appeared about the thin lips.

"It needed no courage at all, friend Calabressa. His Eminence knows who we are, no one better. The courage was his. It is not a pleasant thing when you are told that within a certain given time you will be a dead man; but Zaccatelli did not blanch; no, he was very polite to me. He paid us compliments. We were not like the others, Calabressa. We were good citizens and Christians; even his Holiness might be induced to lend an ear; why should not the Church and we be friends?"

Calabressa burst out laughing.

"Surely evil days have fallen on the Pope, Brother Granaglia, when one of his own Cardinals proposes that he should at last countenance a secret society. But his Eminence was mad with fear, was it not so? He wanted to win you over with promises, eh? Idle words, and no more. He feeds you on wind; and sends you away; and returns to his mistresses and his wines and his fountains of perfume?"

"Not quite so," said the other, with the same dry smile. "His Eminence, as I say to you, knows as well as any one in Europe who and what we are, and what is our power. The day after I called on him with my little message, what does he do—of his own free will, mind you—but send back the daughter of old De Bedros to her home; with a pledge to her father that she shall have a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. The father is pleased; the daughter is not. She sits and cries. She talks of herself getting at him with a stiletto."

He took a cigarette; and accepted a light from Calabressa.

"Further," he continued, "his Eminence is so kind as to propose to give the Council an annual subsidy from his own purse of thirty thousand lire."

"Thirty thousand lire!" Calabressa exclaimed.

But at this point even Granaglia began to laugh.

"Yes, yes, my friend," he said, apparently apostrophizing the absent Cardinal. "You know, then, who we are; and you do not wish to give up all your pleasures. No; we are to become the good boy among secret societies; we are to have the blessing of the Pope; we are to fight Prince Bismarck for you. Prince Bismarck has all his knights and his castles on the board; but what are they against an angelic host of bishops, and some millions of common pawns? Prince Bismarck wishes to plunge Europe again into war. The Church, with this tremendous engine within reach, says, No. Do you wish to find eight men —eight men, at the least—out of every company of every regiment in all your *corps d'armée* throw down their rifle at the first onset of battle? You will shoot them for mutiny? My dear fellow, you cannot; the enemy is upon you. With eight men out of each company throwing down their weapons and determined either to desert or die, how on earth can you fight at all? Well, then, good Bismarck, you had better make your peace with the Church, and rescind those Falk laws. What do you think of that scheme, Calabressa? It was ingenious, was it not, to have come into the head of a man under sentence of death?"

"But the thirty thousand lire, Brother Granaglia. It is a tremendous bribe."

"The Council does not accept bribes, Brother Calabressa," said the other, coldly.

"It is decided, then, that the decree remains to be executed?"

"I know of nothing to the contrary. But if you wish to know for certain, you must seek the Council. They are at Naples."

He pulled an ink-bottle before him; and made a motion with his fore-finger.

"You understand?"

"Yes, yes," Calabressa answered. "And I will go on to Naples, Brother Granaglia. For I have with me one who I think will carry out the wishes of the Council effectively so far as his Eminence the Cardinal is concerned."

"Who is he?" said the other; but with no great interest.

"Yakov Kirski. He is a Russian."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CLIMAX.

It was a momentous decision that George Brand had to arrive at; and yet he scarcely seemed to be aware of it. The man had changed so much during these past six months.

"Do you know, Evelyn," he was saying to his friend, on the very evening on which his answer was to be given to Ferdinand Lind, "I am beginning to look on that notion of my going to America with anything but dislike. Rather the opposite, indeed. I should like to get rid of a lot of old associations; and start in a new

and wider field. With another life to lead, don't you want another sort of world to live it in?"

Lord Evelyn regarded him. No one had observed with a closer interest the gradual change that had come over this old friend of his. And he was proud of it, too; for had it not been partly of his doing?

"One does not breathe free air here," Brand continued, rather absently—as if his mental vision was fixed on the greater spaces beyond the seas. "With a new sort of life beginning, wouldn't it be better to start it under new conditions — feeling yourself unhampered—with nothing around you to disturb even the foolishness of your dreams and hopes? Then you could work away at your best, leaving the result to time."

"I know perfectly what all that means," Lord Evelyn said. "You are anxious to get away from Lind. You believe in your work; but you don't like to be associated with him."

"Perhaps I know a little more than you, Evelyn," said Brand, gently, "of Lind's relation to the Society. He does not represent it to me at all. He is only one of its servants, like ourselves. But don't let us talk about him."

"You *must* talk about him," Lord Evelyn said, as he pulled out his watch. "It is now seven. At eight you go to the initiation of Molyneux; and you have promised to give Lind his answer to-night. Well?"

Brand was playing idly with a pocket-pencil. After a minute or two he said—

"I promised Natalie to consider this thing without any reference to her whatever—that I would decide just as if there was no possibility of her becoming my wife. I promised that; but it is hard to do, Evelyn. I

have tried to imagine my never having seen her; and that I had been led into this affair solely through you. Then I do think that if you had come to me and said that my giving up every penny I possess would forward a good work—would do indirect benefit to a large number of people—and so forth—I do think I could have said, 'All right, Evelyn; take it.' I never cared much for money; I fancy I could get on pretty well on a sovereign a week. I say that if you had come to me with this request——"

"Precisely," Lord Evelyn said, quickly. "You would have said yes, if I had come to you. But because it is Lind, whom you distrust, you fall away from the height of self-sacrifice; and regard the proposal from the point of view of the Waldegrave Club. Mind you, I am not counselling you one way or the other. I am only pointing out to you that it is your dislike of Lind that prevents your doing what you otherwise would have done."

"Very well," said the other, boldly. "Have I not reason to distrust him? How can I explain his conduct, and his implied threats, except on the supposition that he has been merely playing with me, as far as his daughter is concerned; and that, as soon as I had handed over this property, I should find it out? Oh, it is a very pretty scheme altogether. This heap of English money transferred to the treasury; Lind at length achieving his ambition of being put on the Council; Natalie carried off to Italy; and myself granted the honour of stepping into Lind's shoes in Lisle Street. On the other hand: 'Refuse, and we pack you off to America.' Now, you know, Evelyn, one does not like to be threatened into anything."

"Then you have decided to say no?"

He did not answer for a second or two; when he did, his manner was quite changed.

"I rather think I know what both you and Natalie would have me do; although you won't say so explicitly. And if you and she had come to me with this proposal, do you think there would have been any difficulty? I should have been satisfied if she had put her hand in mine, and said, 'Thank you.' Then I should have reminded her that she was sacrificing something too."

He relapsed into silence again; Lord Evelyn was vaguely conscious that the minutes were passing by; and that his friend seemed as far off as ever from any decision.

"You remember the old-fashioned rose-garden, Evelyn?"

"At the Beeches? Yes."

"Don't you think Natalie would like the view from that side of the house? And if she chose that side, I was thinking of having a conservatory built all the length of the rooms, with steps opening out into the rose-garden. She could go out there for a stroll of a morning."

So these had been his dreams?

"If I go to America," he said presently, "I should expect you to look after the old place a little bit. You might take your sisters there occasionally, and turn them loose; it wants a woman's hand here and there. Mrs. Alleyne would put you up all right; and of course I should send Waters down; and give up those rooms in Buckingham Street."

"But I cannot imagine your going to America, some-

how," Lord Evelyn said. "Surely there is plenty for you to do here."

"I will say this of Lind, that he is not an idle talker. What he says he means. Besides, Molyneux can take up my work in the north; he is the very man."

Again silence. It was now half-past seven.

"I wish, though, it had been something more exciting," Brand said. "I should not have minded having a turn at the Syrian business; I am not much afraid of risking my neck. There is not much danger in Philadelphia."

"But look here, Brand," said Lord Evelyn, regarding him attentively. "You are speaking with great equanimity about your going to America; possibly you might like the change well enough. But do I understand you that you are prepared to go alone?"

Brand looked up; he understood what was meant.

"If I am ordered: yes."

He held out his right hand; on the third finger there was a massive gold ring—a plain hoop, without any motto or design whatever.

"There," said he, "is the first ring I ever wore. It was given to me this afternoon; to remind me of a promise. And that promise is to me more binding than a hundred oaths."

He rose, with a sigh.

"Ah, well, Evelyn, whatever happens we will not complain. There have been compensations."

"But you have not told me what answer you mean to give to Lind."

"Suppose I wait until I see him before deciding?"

"Then you will say no. You have allowed your distrust of him to become a sort of mania; and the

moment you see him the mere sight of him will drive you into antagonism."

"I tell you what I wish I could do, Evelyn," said the other, laughing. "I wish I could turn over everything I have got to you; and escape scot-free to America and start my own life free and unencumbered."

"And alone?"

His face grew grave again.

"There is nothing possible else?" said he.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he left. As he walked along Piccadilly a clear and golden twilight was shining over the trees in the Green Park. All around him was the roar of the London streets; but it was not that that he heard. Was it not rather the sound of a soft, low voice, and the silvery notes of the zither? His memory acted as a sea-shell; and brought him an echo from other days and other climes.

Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!

The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

Lascia l'amico tetto,
Vien meco a navigar!

Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens —See, O the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

Sull'onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!

This was the voice that he heard amid the roar of the London streets. Would he hear it far away on the wide Atlantic, with the shores of England hidden

behind the mists of rain? To-night was to decide what the future of his life was to be.

If Natalie had appeared at this moment and said to him, "Dearest, let it be as my father wishes;" or if Lord Evelyn had frankly declared to him that it was his duty to surrender his possessions to this Society to which he had devoted his life, there would have been not a moment's hesitation. But now he was going to see a man whom he suspected, and was inclined to hate; and his nature began to harden. It would be a question between one man of the world and another. Sentiment would be put aside. He would no longer be played with. A man should be master of his own affairs.

This was what he said to himself. But he had quite forgotten his determination to consider this matter as if no Natalie existed; and his resolve to exclude sentiment altogether did not interfere with the fact that always, if unconsciously, there remained in his mind a certain picture he had been dreaming a good deal about of late. It was a picture of an old-fashioned rose-garden, in the light of an English summer morning; with a young wife walking there, herself taller and fairer than any flower. Would she sing in her gladness—the songs of other lands—to charm the sweet English air? There was that one about *O dolce Napoli!—o suol beato!*——

When he got to Lisle Street every one had arrived, except Molyneux himself. Mr. Lind was gravely polite to him. Of course no mention could then be made about private affairs; the talk going on was all about the East and how certain populations were faring.

Presently the pink-faced farmer-agitator was ushered

in, looking a little bit alarmed. But this frightened look speedily disappeared, and gave place to one of mild astonishment, as he appeared to recognize the faces of one or two of those in the room. The business of the evening, so far as the brief formalities were concerned, was speedily got over; and five of the members of the small assembly immediately left.

"Now, Mr. Molyneux," said Ferdinand Lind, pleasantly, "Mr. Brand and I have some small private matters to talk over: will you excuse us if we leave you for a few minutes? Here are some articles of our association which you may look over in the mean time. May I trouble you to follow me, Mr. Brand?"

Brand followed him into an inner and smaller room; and sat down.

"You said you would have your mind made up to-day with regard to the proposal I put before you," Mr. Lind observed, with a matter-of-fact air, as he drew in his chair to the small table.

Brand simply nodded, and said 'Yes.' He was measuring his man. He thought his manner was a good deal too suave.

"But allow me to say, my dear Mr. Brand, that as far as I am concerned, there is no hurry. Have you given yourself time? It is a matter of moment; one should consider."

"I have considered."

His tone was firm. One would have thought he had never had any hesitation at all. But his decision had not been definitely arrived at until, some quarter of an hour before, he had met Ferdinand Lind face to face.

"I may say at once that I prefer to remain in my present grade."

He was watching Lind as he spoke. There was a slight, scarcely perceptible movement of the eyebrows; that was all. The quiet courtesy of his manner remained undisturbed.

"That is your decision, then," he said, just as if some trifling matter had been arranged.

"Perhaps I need not bother you with my reasons," Brand continued, speaking slowly and with precision, "but there are several."

"I have no doubt you have given the subject serious consideration," said Mr. Lind, without expressing any further interest or curiosity.

Now this was not at all what George Brand wanted. He wanted to have his suspicions allayed or confirmed. He wanted to let this man know how he read the situation.

"One reason I may as well name to you, Mr. Lind," said he—being forced to speak more plainly. "If I were to marry, I should like to give my wife a proper home. I should not like her to marry a pauper —one dependent on the complaisance of other people. And really it has seemed to me strange that you, with your daughter's future, your daughter's interests to think of, should have made this proposal——"

Lind interrupted him with a slight deprecatory motion of the hand.

"Pardon me," said he. "Let us confine ourselves to business, if you please."

"I presume it is a man's business to provide for the future of his wife," said Brand, somewhat hotly; his pride beginning to kick against this patronizing graciousness of manner.

"I must beg of you, my dear sir," said Mr. Lind, with the same calm courtesy, "to keep private interests

and projects entirely outside of this matter, which relates to the Society alone, and your duty, and the wishes of those with whom you are associated. You have decided?—very well. I am sorry; but you are within your right."

"How can you talk like that?" said Brand, bluntly. "Sorry? that your daughter is not to marry a beggar?"

"I must decline to have Natalie introduced into this subject in any way whatever," said Mr. Lind.

"Let us drop the subject, then," said Brand, in a friendly way, for he was determined to have some further enlightenment. "Now, about Natalie. May I ask you plainly if you have any objection to a marriage between her and myself?"

The answer was prompt and emphatic.

"I have every objection. I have said before that it would be inexpedient in many ways. It is not to be thought of."

Brand was not surprised by this refusal; he had expected it; he had put the question as a matter of form.

"Now one other question, Mr. Lind, and I shall be satisfied," said he, watching the face of the man opposite him with a keen scrutiny. "Was it ever your intention, at any time, to give your consent to our marriage, in any circumstances whatever?"

Ferdinand Lind was an admirable actor.

"Is it worth while discussing imaginary things—possibilities only?" he said, carelessly.

"Because, you see," continued Brand, who was not to be driven from his point, "any plain and ordinary person, looking from the outside at the whole affair, might imagine that you had been merely temporizing with me, neither giving nor refusing your consent,

until I had handed over this money; and that, as you had never intended to let your daughter marry, that was the reason why you did not care whether I retained a penny of my own property or not."

Lind did not flinch for an instant; nor was there the slightest trace of surprise, or annoyance, or resentment in his look. He rose, and pushed back his chair.

"Suppose we let outsiders think what they please, Mr. Brand," said he, with absolute composure. "We have more serious matters to attend to."

Brand rose also. He guessed what was coming; and he had nerved himself to face it. The whole course of this man's action was now as clear to him as noonday.

"I have been considering further the suggestion I mentioned to you the other day, that you should go over to some of the big American cities," said Mr. Lind, almost with an indifferent air, as he turned over some papers. "We are strong there; you will find plenty of friends; but what is wanted is cohesion, arrangement, cooperation. Now you say yourself this Mr. Molyneux would be an admirable successor to you in the north?"

"None better," said Brand. This sentence of banishment had been foreseen; he knew how to encounter it when it came.

"I think, on the whole, it would be advisable then. When could you go?"

"I could start to-night," he said. But then despite himself, a blush of embarrassment mounted to his forehead, and he added, quickly, "No. Not to-night. The day after to-morrow."

"There is no need for any such great hurry," said

Mr. Lind, with his complaisant smile. "You will want much direction, many letters. Come, shall we join your friend in the other room?"

The two men, apparently on the best of terms, went back to Molyneux; and the talk became general. George Brand, as he sat there, kept his right hand shut tight; that so he could press the ring that Natalie had given him; and when he thought of America, it was almost with a sense of relief. She would approve; he would not betray his promise to her. But if only that one moment were over, in which he should have to bid her farewell!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GOOD-NIGHT MESSAGE.

BRAND had nerved himself for that interview; he had determined to betray neither surprise nor concern; he was prepared for the worst. When it was intimated to him that henceforth his life was to be lived out beyond the seas, he had appeared to take it as a matter of course. Face to face with his enemy, he would utter no protest. Then, had he not solemnly promised to Natalie that nothing in the world should tempt him from his allegiance? Why should he shrink from going to America, or prefer London to Philadelphia? He had entered into a service that took no heed of such things.

But when he had parted from Lind and Molyneux, and get out into the sombre glare of the night-world of London; and when there was no further need for that forced composure, he began more clearly to recognize his position; and his heart grew heavy. This, then, was the end of those visions of loving com-

panionship and constant and sustaining sympathy with which he had dared to fill the future? He had thought little of anything that might be demanded from him so long as he could anticipate Natalie's approval, and be rewarded with a single glance of gratitude from the proud, dark, beautiful eyes. What mattered it to him what became of himself, what circumstances surrounded them, so long as he and she were together? But now a more terrible sacrifice than any he had dreamed of had to be made. The lady of love whom the Pilgrims had sworn to serve was proving herself inexorable indeed:

—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
—Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except to serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain
And work and wait and watch out all his years.

When Lord Evelyn had asked him whether he was prepared to go to America, *alone*, he had clasped the ring that Natalie had given him, and answerd "Yes." But that was as a matter of theory. It was what he might do, in certain possible circumstances. Now that he had to face the reality, and bethink him of the necessity of taking Natalie's hand for the last time, his heart sank within him.

He walked on blindly through the busy streets, seeing nothing around him. His memory was going over the most trivial incidents connected with Natalie, as if every look of hers, every word she had uttered, was now become something inexpressibly precious. Were there not many things he could carry away with him to the land beyond the seas? No distance or time

could rob him of the remembrance of that night at the opera—the scent of white rose—her look as she gave him the forget-me-nots. Then the beautiful shining day as they drew near to Dover; and her pride about England; and the loosened curls of hair that blew about her neck. Or the very first evening on which he had seen her—she sitting at the table and bending over the zither—her profile touched by the rose-tinted light from the shade of the candle—the low, rich voice, only half heard, singing the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*. He felt the very touch of her fingers on his arm when she turned to him with reproving eyes: "*Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?*" That poor devil of a Kirski: what had become of him? He would find out from Reitzei; and, before leaving England, would take care that something should be done for the luckless outcast. He should have cause to remember all his life long that Natalie Lind had interfered in his behalf.

Without knowing well how he got there, Brand found himself in Curzon Street. He walked on, perhaps with some vague notion that he might meet Natalie herself, until he arrived at the house. It was quite dark; there was no light in any of the windows; Anneli had not even lit the gas-jet in the narrow hall. He turned away from the door that he felt was now barred against him for ever; and walked back to Clarges Street.

Lord Evelyn was out; the man did not know when he would be home again. So Brand turned away from that door also; and resumed his aimless wanderings, busy with those pictures of the past. At length he got down to Buckingham Street; and almost mechanically made his way towards his own rooms.

He had not reached his door, however, when he heard some one speaking within.

"I might have known," he said to himself. "That is so like Evelyn."

It was indeed Lord Evelyn, who was chatting familiarly with old Waters. But the moment Brand entered, he ceased; and a look of anxiety, and even alarm, appeared instantly on the fine, sensitive, expressive face.

"What is the matter, Brand? Are you ill?"

"No," said the other, dropping into a chair; "only tired—and worried, perhaps. Waters, get me a biscuit and a glass of sherry. Now, when I think of it, I ought to feel tired—I have eaten nothing since eight o'clock this morning."

Lord Evelyn jumped to his feet.

"Come off at once, Brand. We will go up to the Strand, and get you something to eat. Gracious goodness, it is nearly ten o'clock!"

"No, no, never mind. I have something to talk to you about, Evelyn."

"But why on earth had Waters no dinner waiting for you?"

"I did not tell him. I forgot. Never mind; I will have some supper by-and-by. I called on you, Evelyn, about half an hour ago; I might have known you would be here."

Lord Evelyn paused for a second or two, while Waters came in and went out again. Then he said—

"I can tell by your face, Brand, that something has happened."

"Nothing that I had not foreseen."

"Did you consent or refuse?"

"I refused."

"Well?"

"Then, as I knew he would, he suggested that I

might as well get ready to start for America as soon as possible."

Brand was speaking in a light and scornful way; but his face was careworn; and his eyes kept turning to the windows and the dark night outside, as if they were looking at something far away.

"About Natalie?" Lord Evelyn asked.

"Oh, he was frank enough. He dropped all those roundabout phrases about the great honour and so forth. He was quite plain. 'Not to be thought of.'"

Lord Evelyn remained silent for some time.

"I am very sorry, Brand," he said, at length; and then he continued with some hesitation—"Do you know—I have been thinking—that—that though it is a very extreme thing for a man to give up his fortune—a very extreme thing—I can quite understand how the proposal looked to you very monstrous at first—still, if you put that in the balance as against a man's giving up his native country and the woman whom he is in love with—don't you see—the happiness of two people is of so much more importance than a sum of money, however large——"

"My dear fellow," said Brand, interrupting him, "there is no such alternative—there never was any such alternative. Do you not think I would rather give up twenty fortunes than have to go and bid good-bye to Natalie? It is not a question of money. I suspected before—I know now—that Lind never meant to let his daughter marry. He would not definitely say no to me, while he thought I could be persuaded about this money business; as soon as I refused that, he was frank and explicit enough. I see the whole thing clearly enough now. Well, he has not altogether succeeded."

His eye happened to light on the ring on his finger; and the frown on his face lifted somewhat.

"If I could only forget Lind; if I could forget why it was that I had to go to America, I should think far less of the pain of separation. If I could go to Natalie, and say, 'Look at what we must do, for the sake of something greater than our own wishes and dreams,' then I think I could bid her good-bye without much faltering; but when you know that it is unnecessary—that you are being made the victim of a piece of personal revenge—how can you look forward with any great enthusiasm to the new life that lies before you? That is what troubles me, Evelyn."

"I cannot argue the matter with you," his friend said, looking down, and evidently much troubled himself. "I cannot help remembering that it was I let you in for all this——"

"Don't say that, Evelyn," Brand broke in, quickly. "Do you think I would have it otherwise? Once in America, I shall no doubt forget how I came to go there. I shall have something to do."

"I—I was going to say that—that perhaps you are not quite fair to Lind. You impute motives that may not exist."

Lord Evelyn flushed a little; it was almost as if he were excusing or defending one he had no particular wish to defend; but all the same, with some hesitation, he continued—

"Consider Lind's position. Mind, your reading of his conduct is only pure assumption. It is quite possible that he would be really and extremely surprised if he knew that you fancied he had been allowing personal feelings to sway his decision. But suppose this—suppose he is honestly convinced that you would

be of great service in America. He has seen what you can do in the way of patient persuading of people. I know he has plenty around him who can do the risky business—men who have been adventurous all their lives—who would like nothing better than to be commissioned to set up a secret printing-press next door to the Commissary of Police in St. Petersburg. I say he has plenty of people like that; but very few who have persistence and patience enough to do what you have been doing in the north of England. He told me so himself. Very well. Suppose he thinks that what you have been doing this man Molyneux can carry on? Suppose, in short, that if he had no daughter at all, he would be anxious to send you to the States?"

Brand nodded. There was no harm in letting his friend have his theory.

"Very well. Now suppose that, having this daughter, he would rather not have her marry. He says she is of great service to him; and his wish to have her with him always would probably exaggerate that service, unconsciously to himself, if it were proposed to take her away. That is only natural?"

Brand again assented.

"Very well. He discovers that you and she are attached to each other. Probably he does not consider it a very serious affair, so far; but he knows that, if you remain in London, it would probably become so. Now, Natalie is a girl of firm character; she is very gentle, but she is not a fool. If you remained in London, she would probably marry you, whether her father liked it or not, if she thought it was right. He knows that; he knows that the girl is capable of acting on her own judgment. Now, put the two things together. Here is this opportune service on which you can be

sent. That, according to his view, will be a good thing in itself; it will also effectually prevent a marriage which he thinks would be inexpedient. Don't you see that there may be no personal revenge or malice in the whole affair? He may consider he is acting quite rightly, with regard to the best interests of everybody concerned."

"I am sick of him, Evelyn—of hearing of him—of thinking of him," Brand said, impatiently. "Come, let us talk of something else. I wish the whole business of starting for America were over; and I had only the future to think about."

"That is not likely," said Lord Evelyn, gently. "You cannot cut yourself away from everything like that. There will be *some* memories."

Waters here appeared with a tray; and speedily placed on the table a lobster, some oysters, and a bottle of Chablis.

"There you are, Evelyn; have some supper."

"Not unless you have some."

"By-and-by——"

"No, now."

So the two friends drew in their chairs.

"I have been thinking," said Lord Evelyn—with a slight flush, for he was telling a lie—"I have been thinking for some time back I should like to go to America for a year or two. There are some political phases I should like to study."

Brand looked at him.

"You never thought of it before to-night. But it is like you to think of it now."

"Oh, I assure you," said the other, hastily, "there are points of great interest in the political life of America that one could only properly study on the

spot—hearing the various opinions, don't you know—and seeing how the things practically work. I should have gone long before now, but that I dreaded the passage across. When do you go?"

"It is not settled yet."

"What line shall you go by?"

"I don't know."

Lord Evelyn paused for a moment; then he said—

"I'll go with you, Brand."

Well, he had not the heart even to protest; for he thoroughly understood the generous friendship that had prompted such an offer. He might remonstrate afterwards; now he would not. On the contrary, he began to speak of his experience of the various lines; of the delight of the voyage to any one not abnormally sensitive to sea-sickness; of the humours of the bagmen; of the occupations and amusements on board; of dolphins, fog-horns, icebergs, rope-quoits, grass-widows, and the chances of poker. It was all a holiday excursion, then? The two friends lit their cigars, and went back to their armchairs. The tired and haggard look on George Brand's face had for the moment been banished.

But by-and-by he said, rather absently—

"I suppose, hereafter, Natalie and you will have many a talk over what has happened. And you will go there just as usual, and spend the evening, and hear her read, or listen to her singing with the zither. It seems strange. Perhaps she will be able to forget altogether; to cut this unhappy episode out of her life, as it were." Then he added, as if speaking to himself: "No, she is not likely to forget."

Lord Evelyn looked up.

"In the mean time, does she know about your going?"

"I presume not—not yet. But I must see her, and tell her. Unless, indeed, Lind should try to prevent that too. He might lay injunctions on her that she was not to see me again."

"That is true," his friend said. "He might command. But the question is whether she would obey. I have known Natalie Lind longer than you have. She is capable of thinking and acting for herself."

Nothing further was said on this point; they proceeded to talk of other matters. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour afterwards—close on eleven o'clock—that Waters knocked at the door and then came into the room.

"A letter for you, sir."

A quick glance at the envelope startled him.

"How did you get it?" he said, instantly.

"A girl brought it, sir, in a cab. She is gone again. There was no answer, she said."

Waters withdrew. Brand hastily opened the letter, and read the following lines, written in pencil, apparently with a trembling hand:—

"*DEAREST,*

"*I spent this evening with Madame Potecki. My father came for me; and on the way home has told me something of what has occurred. It was for the purpose of telling me that you and I must not meet again—never, never. My own, I cannot allow you to pass a single night, or a single hour, thinking such a thing possible. Have I not promised to you? When it is your wish to see me, come to me: I am yours. Good night; and Heaven guard you!*

"*NATALIE.*"

George Brand turned to his friend.

"This," said he—but his lip trembled, and he stopped for a second. Then he continued: "This is a message from her, Evelyn. And I know what poor old Calabressa would say of it, if he were here. He would say: 'That is what might have been expected from the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi!'"

"She knows, then?"

"Yes," said he, still looking at the hastily written lines in pencil. "And it is as you imagined. Her father has told her we must not see each other again; and she has refused to be bound by any such injunction. I rather fancy she thinks he must have conveyed the same intimation to me; at all events she has written at once to assure me that she will not break her promise to me. It was kindly meant: was it not? I wish Anneli had waited for a second."

He folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket-book; it was one more treasure he should carry with him to America. But when, later on, Evelyn had left, he took it out again, and re-read again and again the irregular, hurried, pencilled lines; and thought of the proud, quick, generous spirit that had prompted them. And was she still awake, and thinking? And could her heart hear, through the silence of the night, the message of love and gratitude that he sent her? *"Good night; and Heaven guard you!"* It had been a troubled and harassing day for him; but this tender good-night message came in at the close of it, like a strain of sweet music, that he would carry with him into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOME TREASURES.

THE next morning Natalie was sitting alone in the little dining-room, dressed ready to go out. Perhaps she had been crying a little by herself; but at all events, when she heard the sound of some one being admitted at the front door, and coming into the passage, she rose with a flush of pleasure and relief appearing on her pale and saddened face. It was Madame Potecki.

"Ah, it is so good of you to come early," said Natalie to her friend, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "Shall we start at once? I have been thinking and thinking myself into a state of misery; and what is the use of that?"

"Let me look at you," said the prompt little music-mistress, taking both her hands, and regarding her with her clear, shrewd blue eyes. "No; you are not looking well. The walk will do you good, my dear. Come away, then."

But Natalie paused in the passage, with some appearance of embarrassment. Anneli was standing by the door.

"Remember this, Anneli: if any one calls and wishes to see me—and particularly wishes to see me—you will not say, 'My mistress is gone out.' You will say, 'My mistress is gone to the South Kensington Museum, with Madame Potecki.' Do you understand that, Anneli?"

"Yes, Fräulein; certainly."

Then they left, going by way of the Park. And the morning was fresh and bright; the energetic little Polish lady was more talkative and cheerful than ever;

the girl with her had only to listen, with as much appearance of interest as was possible, considering that her thoughts were so apt to wander away elsewhither.

"My dear, what a lovely morning for us to go and look at my treasures! The other day I was saying to myself, 'There is my adopted daughter Natalie; and I have not a farthing to leave her. What is the use of adopting a child if you have nothing to leave her?' Then I said to myself, 'Never mind: I will teach her my theory of living; that will make her richer than a hundred legacies will do.' Dear, dear, that was all the legacy my poor husband left to me."

She passed her hand over her eyes.

"Don't you ever marry a man who has anything to do with politics, my child. Many a time my poor Potecki used to say to me, 'My angel, cultivate contentment; you may have to live on it some day.'"

"And you have taken his advice, madame; you are very content."

"Why? Because I have my theory. They think that I am poor. It is poor Madame Potecki, who earns her solitary supper by 'One, two, three, four; One, two, three, four;' who has not a treasure in the world —except a young Hungarian lady, who is almost a daughter to her. Well, well; but you know my way of thinking, my dear: you laugh at it; I know you do. You say, 'That mad little Madame Potecki.' But some day I will convince you."

"I am willing to be taught now, madame—seriously. Is it not wise to be content?"

"I am more than content, my dear; I am proud; I am vain. When I think of all the treasures that belong to the public, and to me as one of the public—the

Turner landscapes in the National Gallery; the books and statues in the British Museum; the bronzes and china and jewellery at South Kensington—do you not think, my dear, that I am thankful I have no paltry little collection in my own house, that I should be ashamed of? Then look at the care that is taken of them. I have no risk. I am not disheartened for a day because a servant has broken my best piece of Nankin blue. I have no trouble and no thought; it is only when I have a little holiday that I say to myself, 'Well, shall I go and see my Rembrandts? Or shall I look over my cases of Etruscan rings? Or shall I go and feast my eyes on the *bleu de roi* of a piece of jewelled Sèvres?' Oh, my love!"

She clasped her hands in ecstacy. Her volubility had outrun itself, and got choked.

"I will show you three vases," said she, presently, in almost a solemn way; "I will show you three vases, in white and brown crackle, that put all the colour in the whole of my collection to shame. My dear, I have never seen in the world anything so lovely—the soft cream-white ground, the rich brown decoration—the beautiful, bold, graceful shape; and they only cost £60!—£60 for the three; and they worth a kingdom! Why——But really, my dear Natalie, you walk too fast. I feel as if I were being marched off to prison!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said the girl, laughing. "I am always forgetting; and papa scolds me often enough for it."

"Have you heard what I told you about those priceless vases in the South Kensington?"

"I am most anxious to see them, I assure you."

"My blue and white," Madame Potecki continued, seriously, "I am afraid is not always of the best. There

are plenty of good pieces, it is true; but they are not the finest feature of the collection. Oh! the Benares brocades—I had forgotten them. Ah, my dear, these will make you open your eyes!"

"But don't you get bewildered, madame, with having to think of so many possessions?" said Natalie, respectfully.

"No," said the other, in a matter-of-fact way. "I take them one by one. I pay a morning call here, a morning call there, when I have no appointments, just to see that everything is going on well."

Presently she said—

"Ah, well, my dear, we are poor, weak creatures. Here and there in my wanderings I have met things that I almost coveted; but see, what an impossible, monstrous collection they would make! Let me think, now. The Raphael at Dresden; two Titian portraits in the Louvre; the Venus of Milo—not the Medici one at all; I would not take it; I swear I would not accept it, that trivial little creature with the yellow skin!"

"My dear friend, the heavens will fall on you!" her companion exclaimed.

"Wait a moment," said the little music-mistress, reflectively. "I have not completed my collection. There is a Holy Family of Botticelli's—I forget where I saw it. And the bust of the Empress Messalina in the Uffizi: did you ever notice it, Natalie?"

"No."

"Do not forget it when you are in Florence again. You won't believe any of the stories about her when you see the beautiful refined face: only don't forget to remark how flat the top of her head is. Well, where are we, my dear? The bronze head of the goddess in the Castellani collection: I would have that; and the

fighting Temeraire. Will these do? But then, my dear, even if one had all these things, see what a monstrous collection they would make. What should I do with them in my lodgings, even if I had room? No; I must be content with what I have."

By this time they had got down into South Kensington, and were drawing near one of Madame Potecki's great treasure-houses.

"Then, you see, my dear Natalie," she continued, "my ownership of these beautiful things we are going to see is not selfish. It can be multiplied indefinitely. You may have it too; any one may have it, and all without the least anxiety!"

"That is very pleasant also," said the girl, who was paying less heed now. The forced cheerfulness that had marked her manner at starting had in great measure left her. Her look was absent; she blindly followed her guide through the little wicket, and into the hushed large hall.

The silence was grateful to her; there was scarcely any one in the place. While Madame Potecki busied herself with some catalogue or other, the girl turned aside into a recess, to look at a cast of the effigy on the tomb of Queen Eleanor of Castile. A tombstone stills the air around it. Even this gilt plaster figure was impressive; it had the repose of the dead.

But she had not been standing there for a couple of seconds when she heard a well-known voice behind her.

"Natalie!"

She knew. There was neither surprise nor shamefacedness in her look when she turned and saw George Brand before her. Her eyes were as fearless as ever when they met his; and they were glad, too, with a sudden joy; and she said quickly—

"Ah, I thought you would come. I told Anneli."

"It was kind of you—and brave—to let me come to see you."

"Kind?" she said. "How could I do otherwise?"

"But you are looking tired, Natalie."

"I did not sleep much last night. I was thinking."

The tears started to her eyes; she impatiently brushed them aside.

"I know what you were thinking. That is why I came so early to see you. You were blaming yourself for what has happened. That is not right. You are not to blame at all. Do you think I gave you that promise for nothing?"

"You were always like that," she said, in a low voice. "Very generous, and unselfish. Yes, I—I—was miserable—I thought if you had never known me——"

"If I had never known you! You think that would be a desirable thing for me!——"

But at this moment the hurried, anxious, half-whispered conversation had to cease; for Madame Potecki came up. Nor was she surprised to find Mr. Brand there. On the contrary, she said that her time was limited; and that she could not expect other people to care for old porcelain as much as she did; and if Mr. Brand would take her dear daughter Natalie to see some pictures in the rooms upstairs, she would come and find her out by-and-by.

"Not at all, dear madame," said Natalie, with some slight flush. "No. We will go with you to see the three wonderful vases."

So they went, and saw the three crackle vases, and many another piece of porcelain and enamel and

bronze; but always the clever little Polish woman took care that she should be at some other case, so that she could not overhear what these two had to say to each other. And they had plenty to say.

"Why, Natalie, where is your courage? What is the going to America? It cannot be for ever and ever."

"But even then?" she said, in a low, hesitating voice. "If you were never to see me again, you would blame me for it all. You would regret."

"How can I regret that my life was made beautiful to me, if only for a time? It was worth nothing to me before. And you are forgetting all about the ring, and my promise to you."

This light way of talking did not at all deceive her. What had been torturing her all the night long was the fancy, the suspicion, that her father was sending her lover to America, not solely with a view to the work he should have to undertake there, but to ensure a permanent separation between herself and him. That was the cruel bit of it. And she more than ever admired the manliness of this man, because he would make no complaint to her. He had uttered no word of protest, for fear of wounding her. He did not mention her father to her at all; but merely treated this project of going to America as if it were a part of his duty, that had to be cheerfully accepted.

"After I have once said good-bye to you, Natalie," said he, "it will not be so bad for me. I shall have my work."

"When do you go?" she asked, with rather a white face.

"I don't know yet. It may be a matter of days. You will let me see you again, my darling—soon?"

"I shall be here every morning, if you wish it," she answered.

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow, at eleven. Anneli will come with me. I should have waited in on the hope of seeing you this morning; but it was an old engagement with Madame Potecki. Ah, how good she is! Do you see how she pretends to be interested in those things?"

"I will send her a present of some old china before I leave England," said Brand.

"No, no," said Natalie, with a faint smile appearing on the sad face. "It would destroy her theory. She does not care for anything at home, so long as she possesses these public treasures. She is very content. Indeed, she earns enough to be charitable. She has many poor dependants."

By-and-by Madame Potecki, with great evident reluctance, confessed that she had to return, as one of her pupils would be at her house by half-past twelve. But would not Mr. Brand take her dear adopted child to see some of the pictures? It was a pity that she should be dragged away; and so forth.

But Natalie promptly put an end to these suggestions by saying that she would prefer to return with Madame Potecki; and, it being now past twelve, as soon as they got outside, she engaged a cab. George Brand saw them off; and then returned into the building. He wished to look again at the objects she had looked at; to recollect every word she had uttered; to recall the very tones in which she had spoken. And this place was so hushed and quiet.

Meanwhile, as the occupants of the cab were journeying northward, Natalie took occasion to say to her companion, with something of a heightened colour—

"You must not imagine, dear madame, that I expected to see Mr. Brand at the Museum when I promised to go with you."

"But what if you had expected, my child?" said the good-natured music-mistress. "What harm is there?"

"But this morning I did expect him to come; and that is why I left the message with Anneli," continued the girl. "Because, do you know, madame, he is going to America; and when he goes, I may not see him again for many years."

"My child!" the demonstrative little woman exclaimed, catching hold of the girl's hand.

But Natalie was not inclined to be sympathetic at this moment.

"Now I wish you, dear Madame Potecki," she continued, in a firm voice, "to do me a favour. I would rather not speak to my father about Mr. Brand. I wish you to tell him for me that, so long as Mr. Brand remains in England, I shall continue to see him; and that, as I do not choose he should come to my father's house, I shall see him as I saw him this morning."

"My love, my love, what a frightful duty! Is it necessary?"

"It is necessary that my father should know, certainly."

"But what a responsibility!"

"You have no responsibility whatever. Anneli will go with me. All that I ask of you, dear Madame Potecki, is to take the message to my father. You will; will you not?"

"More than that I will do for you," said the little woman, boldly. "I see there is unhappiness; you are suffering, my child. Well, I will plunge into it; I will see your father; this cannot be allowed. It is a

dangerous thing to interfere—who knows better than I? But to sit near you is to be inspired; to touch your hand is to gain the courage of a giant. Yes, I will speak to your father; all shall be put right."

The girl scarcely heard her.

"There is another thing I would ask of you," she said, slowly and wistfully, "but not here. May I come to you when the lesson is over?"

"At two: yes."

So it was that Natalie called on her friend shortly after two o'clock; and was shown into the little parlour. She was rather pale. She sat down at one side of the table.

"I wished to ask your advice, dear Madame Potecki," she said, in a low voice, and with her eyes down. "Now you must suppose a case. You must suppose that—that two people love each other—better—better than anything else in the world; and that they are ready to sacrifice a great deal for each other. Well, the man is ordered away; it is a banishment from his own country, perhaps for ever; and he is very brave about it; and will not complain. Now, you must suppose that the girl is very miserable about his going away; and blames herself; and perhaps—perhaps wishes—to do something to show she understands his nobleness—his devotion; and she would do anything in the world—anything in the world, Madame Potecki—to prove her love to him——"

"But child, child, why do you tremble so?"

"I wish you to tell me, Madame Potecki—I wish you to tell me—whether—you would consider it unwomanly—unmaidenly—for her to go and say to him, 'You are too brave and unselfish to ask me to go with

you. Now I offer myself to you. If you must go, why not I—your wife?'"

Madame Potecki started up in great alarm.

"Natalie, what do you mean?"

"I only—wished to—to ask—what you would think."

She was very pale, and her lips were tremulous; but she did not break down. Madame Potecki was apparently far more agitated than she was.

"My child, my child, I am afraid you are on the brink of some wild thing!"

"Is that that I have repeated to you what a girl ought to do?" Natalie said, almost calmly. "Do you think it is what my mother would have done, Madame Potecki? They have told me she was a brave woman."

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN A GARDEN AT POSILIPO.

—Prends mon cœur, me dit-elle,
Oui, mais à la chapelle,
Sois mon petit . . . .
—Plaît-il
Ton petit?
—Sois mon petit mari!

—It was Calabressa who was gaily humming to himself; and it was well that he could amuse himself with his *chansons* and his cigarettes; for his friend Edwards was proving anything but an attentive companion. The tall, near-sighted, blond-faced man from the British Museum was far too much engrossed by the scene around him. They were walking along the quays at Naples; and it so happened that at this moment all the picturesque squalor and lazy life of the place were lit up by the glare reflected from a wild and stormy sunset. The tall, pink-fronted houses; the

mules and oxen with their brazen yokes and tinkling bells; the fruit-sellers, and fish-sellers, and water-carriers, in costumes of many hues; the mendicant friars with their cloak and hood of russet-brown; the priests black and clean-shaven; the groups of women, swarthy of face, with head-dresses of red or yellow, clustered round the stalls; the children, in rags of brown, and scarlet, and olive-green, lying about the pavement as if artists had posed them there;—all these formed a picture which was almost bewildering in its richness of colour; and was no doubt rendered all the more brilliant because of the powerful contrast with the dark and driven sea. For the waters out there were racing in before a stiff breeze, and springing high on the fortresses and rocks; and the clouds overhead were seething and twisting, with many a sudden flash of orange; and then, far away beyond all this colour and motion and change, rose the vast and gloomy bulk of Vesuvius, overshadowed and thunderous, as if the mountain were charged with a coming storm.

Calabressa grew impatient; despite his careless song.

"*—Me seras-tu fidèle . . . .*
—Comme une tourterelle.
—Eh bien, ça va . . . .
Ça va!
—Ça me va!
—Comme ça, ça me va!

—Diable, Monsieur Edouarts! You are very silent. You do not know where we are going, perhaps?"

Edwards started, as if he were waking from a reverie.

"Oh yes, Signor Calabressa," said he, "I am not likely to forget that. Perhaps I think more seriously

about it than you. To you it is nothing. But I cannot forget, you see, that you and I are practically conniving at a murder."

"Hush, hush, my dear friend!" said Calabressa, glancing round. "Be discreet! And what a foolish phrase, too! You? You whose business is merely to translate; to preach; to educate a poor devil of a Russian. What have you to do with it? And to speak of murder! Bah! You do not understand the difference, then, between killing a man as an act of private anger and revenge, and executing a man for crimes against society? My good friend Edouarts, you have lived all your life among books; but you have not learned any logic—no!"

Edwards was not inclined to go into any abstract argument.

"I will do what I have been appointed to do," he said, curtly. "But that cannot prevent my wishing that it had not to be done at all."

"And who knows?" said Calabressa, lightly. "Perhaps, if you are so fearful about your small share—your very little share—it is no more than that of the garçon who helps one on with his coat—is he accessory, too, if a rogue has to be punished?—is he responsible for the sentence, also, if he brushes the boots of the judge?—or the servant of the court, who sweeps out the room, is he guilty if there is a miscarriage of justice? No, no; my dear friend Edouarts, do not alarm yourself. Then, I was saying, perhaps it may not be necessary, after all. You perceived, my friend, that when the proposal of his Eminence the Cardinal was mentioned, the Secretary Granaglia smiled, and I, thoughtless, laughed. You perceived it, did you not?"

By this time they were in the Chiaja, beyond the

Villa Reale; and there were fewer people about. Calabressa stopped; and confronted his companion. For the purposes of greater emphasis, he rested his right elbow in the palm of his left hand, while his forefinger was at the point of his nose.

"What?" said he, in this striking attitude, "what if we were both fools—hé? The Secretary Granaglia and myself—what if we were both fools?"

Calabressa abandoned his pose, linked his arm within that of his companion, and walked on with him.

"Come, I will emplant something in your mind. I will throw out a fancy; it may take root and flourish: if not, who is the worse? Now, if the Council were really to entertain that proposal of Zaccatelli?"

He regarded his friend Edouarts.

"You observed, I say, that Granaglia smiled: to him it was ludicrous. I laughed: to me it was farcical — the chatter of a *bavard.* The Pope become the patron of a secret society! The priests become our friends and allies! Very well, my friend; but listen. The little minds see what is absurd; the great minds are serious. Granaglia is a little devil of courage; but he is narrow; he is practical; he has no imagination. I? What am I?—careless, useless, also a *bavard,* if you will. But it occurred to me, after all, when I began to think—what a great man, a great mind, might say to this proposal. Take a man like Lind: see what he could make of it! 'Do not laugh at it any more, Calabressa,' said I to myself; 'until you hear the opinion of wiser men than yourself.'"

He gripped Edwards's arm tight.

"Listen. To become the allies of the priests, it is not necessary to believe everything the priests say. On the other hand, they need not approve all that we are

doing, if only they withdraw their opposition. Do you perceive the possibility now? Do you think of the force of that combination? The multitudes of the Catholics encouraged to join!—the Vatican the friend and ally of the COUNCIL OF THE SEVEN STARS!"

He spoke the last words in a low voice; but he wore a proud look.

"And if this proposal were entertained," said Edwards, meditatively, "of course, they would abandon this other business."

"My good friend," said Calabressa, confidentially. "I know that Lind, who sees things with a large vision, is against it. He consents—as you consent to do your little outside part—against his own opinion. More; if he had been on the Council, the decree would never have been granted, though De Bedros and a dozen of his daughters had demanded it. 'Calabressa,' he said to me, 'it will do great mischief in England, if it is known that we are connected with it.' Well, you see, all this would be avoided if they closed with the Cardinal's offer."

"You are sanguine, Signor Calabressa," said the other.

"Besides, the thirty thousand lire!" said Calabressa, eagerly. "Do you know what that is? Ah, you English have always too much money!"

"No doubt," said Edwards, with a smile. "We are all up to the neck in gold."

"Thirty thousand lire a year, and the favour of the Vatican; what fools Granaglia and I were to laugh! But perhaps we will find that the Council were wiser."

They had now got out to Posilipo; and the stormy sunset had waned, leaving the sky overclouded and dusk. Calabressa, having first looked up and down the road, stopped by the side of a high wall, over

which projected a number of the broken, grey-green, spiny leaves of the cactus—a hedge at the foot of the terrace above.

"*Peste!*" said he. "How the devil is one to find it out in the dark?"

"Find what out?"

"My good friend," said he, in a whisper, "you are not able by chance to see a bit of thread—a bit of red thread—tied round one of those big leaves?"

Edwards glanced up.

"Not I."

"Ah, well, we must run the risk. Perhaps by accident there may be a meeting."

They walked on for some time, Calabressa becoming more and more watchful. They paused to let a man driving a waggon and a pair of oxen go by; and then Calabressa, enjoining his companion to remain where he was, went on alone.

The changing sky had opened somewhat overhead; and there was a wan twilight shining through the parted clouds. Edwards, looking after Calabressa, could have fancied that the dark figure had disappeared like a ghost; but the old albino had merely crossed the road, opened the one-half of a huge gate, and entered a garden.

It was precisely like the gardens of the other villas along the highway—cut in terraces along the steep side of the hill, with winding pathways, and marble lions here and there, and little groves of orange and olive and fig trees; while on one side the sheer descent was guarded by an enormous cactus hedge. The ground was very unequal; on one small plateau a fountain was playing—the trickling of the water the only sound audible in the silence.

Calabressa took out his pocket-book, and tore a leaf from it.

"The devil!" he muttered to himself. "How is one to write in the dark?"

But he managed to scrawl the word "Barsanti;" then he wrapped the paper round a small pebble; and approached the fountain. By putting one foot on the edge of the stone basin beneath, he could reach over to the curved top; and there he managed to drop the missive into some aperture concealed under the lip. He stepped back; dried his hand with his handkerchief; and then went down one of the pathways to a lower level of the garden.

Here he easily found the entrance to an ordinary sort of grotto—a narrow cave winding inwards and ending in a piece of fancy rockwork down which the water was heard to trickle. But he did not go to the end. He stopped about half-way; and listened. There was no sound whatever in the dark, except the plash of the tiny waterfall.

Then there was a heavy grating noise; and in the black wall before him appeared a vertical line of orange light. This sudden gleam was so bewildering to the eyes that Calabressa could not see who it was that came out to him; he only knew that the stranger waited for him to pass on into the outer air.

"It is cooler here. To your business, friend Calabressa."

The moment Calabressa recognized this tall, military-looking man, with the closely cropped bullet-head and long, silver-white moustache, he whipped off his cap, and said, anxiously—

"A thousand pardons, Excellency! a thousand pardons! Do I interrupt? May not I see Fossati?"

"It is unnecessary. There is much business to-night. One must breathe the air sometimes."

Calabressa for once had completely lost his *sang-froid.* He could not speak for stammering.

"I assure you, your Excellency, it is death to me to think that I interrupt you."

"But why did you come, then, my friend? To the point."

"Zaccatelli," the other managed to get out.

"Well?"

"There was a proposal. Some days ago I saw Granaglia."

"Well?"

"Pardon me, Excellency. If I had known, not for worlds would I have called you——"

"Come, come, my Calabressa," said the other, good-naturedly. "No more apologies. What is it you have to say? The proposal made by the Cardinal? Yes; we know about that."

"And it has not been accepted? The decree remains?"

"You waste your breath, my friend. The decree remains, certainly. We are not children; we do not play. What more, my Calabressa?"

But Calabressa had to collect his thoughts. Then he said, slowly—

"It occurred to me, when I was in England—there was a poor devil there who would have thrown away his life in a useless act of revenge—well——"

"Well, you brought him over here," said the other, interrupting him. "Your object? Ah, Lind and you being old comrades; and Lind appearing to you to be in a difficulty? But did Lind approve?"

"Not quite," said Calabressa, still hesitating. "He allowed us to try. He was doubtful himself."

"I should have thought so," said the other, ironically. "No, good Calabressa; we cannot accept the services of a maniac. The night has got dark; I cannot see whether you are surprised. How do we know? The man Kirski has been twice examined—once in Venice, once this morning, when you went down to the *Luisa;* the reports the same. What? To have a maniac blundering about the gates; attracting every one's notice by his gibberish; then he is arrested with a pistol or a knife in his hand; he talks nonsense about some Madonna; he is frightened into a confession; and we become the laughing-stock of Europe! Impossible—impossible, my Calabressa: where were your wits? No wonder Lind was doubtful——"

"The man is capable of being taught," said Calabressa, humbly.

"We need not waste more breath, my friend. To-night Lind will be reminded why it was necessary that the execution of this decree was entrusted to the English section: he must not send any Russian madman to compromise us."

"Then I must take him back, your Excellency?"

"No; send him back—with the English scholar. You will remain in Naples, Calabressa. There is something stirring that will interest you."

"I am at your service, Excellency."

"Good night, my friend."

The figure beside him had disappeared almost before he had time to return the salutation; and he was left to find his way down to the gate—taking care not to run unawares on one of the long cactus spines. He discovered Edwards precisely where he had left him.